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## Ockley and Leith Hill

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Distance: 11 km=7 miles

easy-to-moderate walking

Region: Surrey

Date written: 17-feb-2011

Author: Schwebefuss

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Refreshments: Forest Green, Ockley

Last update: 10-may-2020

Map: Explorer 146 (Dorking)

*Problems, changes? We depend on your feedback: [feedback@fancyfreewalks.org](mailto:feedback@fancyfreewalks.org)*

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*Village, woodland, hills, views*

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### In Brief

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An ascent of Leith Hill from the steeper south side! This excursion to the South East's highest spot is really a delightful stroll on green meadows past historic cottages with some well-made steps to assist you at the end of the ascent. Coming back, it calls in at the famous rhododendron wood and finds a perfect location for a refreshment break.



There are some nettles bordering the narrow paths in summer. Boots are recommended because of the large meadows. It seems fine for a small or medium-sized dog, with a few stiles near the end that don't have a gap.

This walk could be combined with the [Vann Lake](#) walk in this series, since both walks begin at the same location and both are relatively short.

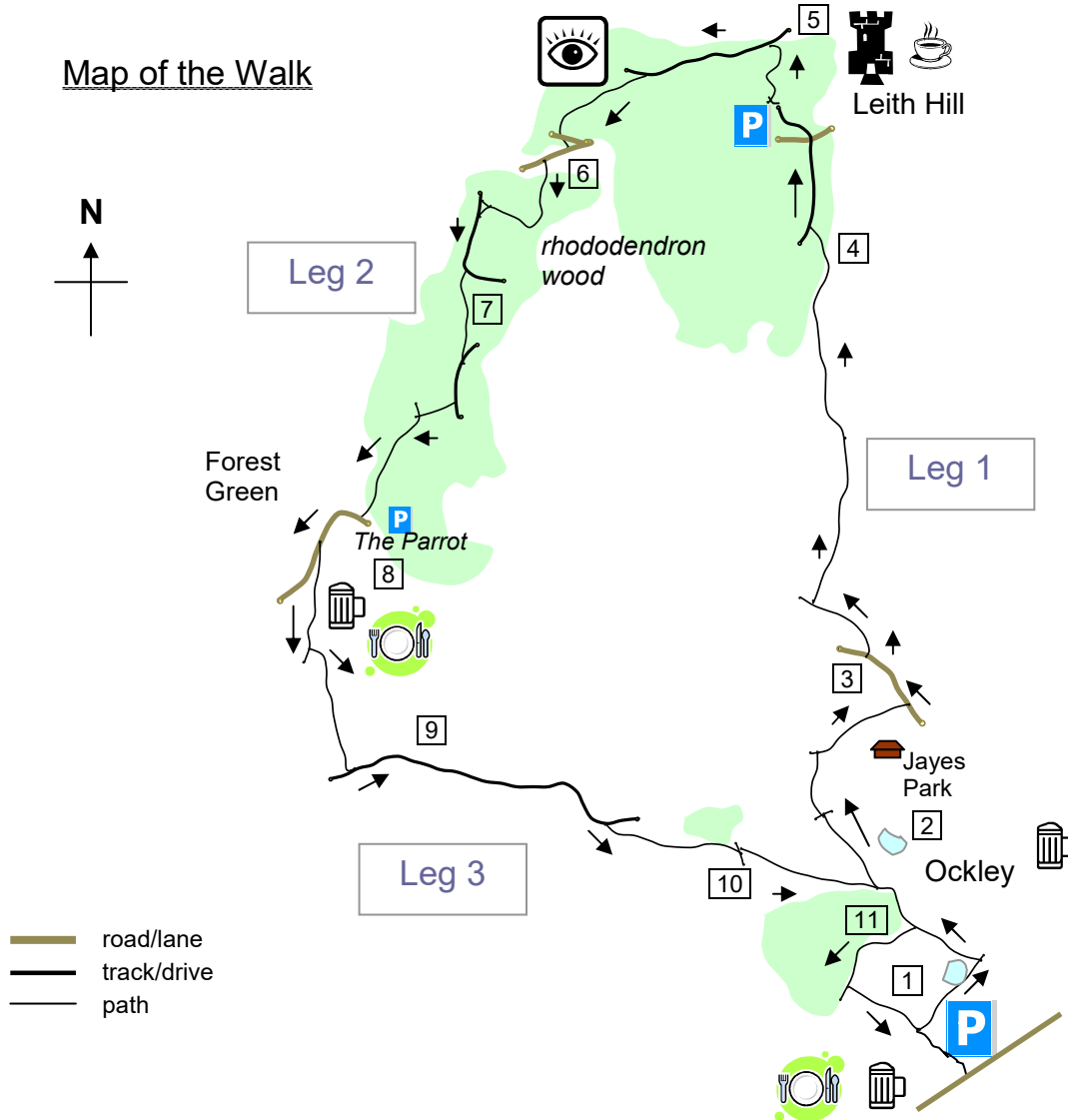
The walk begins off the A29 in **Ockley**. If there is no cricket in progress, park in School Lane (**postcode RH5 5TR**, grid ref 146399) opposite the cricket pavilion or the school. Otherwise, there are spaces opposite the *Inn on the Green* and some spaces in the close by the Cricketers Arms. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

### The Walk

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*Ockley is believed to be the same as Aclea, the site of the defeat of the Danes by the Saxon Ethelwulf in a great battle in 851, as recorded in the Saxon chronicle. William Camden puts it thus: "Aethelwolp the sonne of Egbert, who having beene professed in the holy orders and released by the Popes authority, when hee had possession of his fathers kingdome by right of inheritance, joined battaile with the Danes, fought with good successe, and slew all the valiantest men among them." It lies either side on Stane Street, the long straight Roman road to Noviomagus Reginorum (Chichester).*


## Map of the Walk





### Leg 1: Ockley to Leith Hill

- 1 From School Lane, follow the wide track across the Green, parallel to the main road, with the cricket pitch on your right. On your left as you go is an amazing series of period cottages, some four centuries old and oak beamed, others tile hung, others fantasy Victorian. Leave the track as it bends left to a cottage, passing a large pond on your left and, after the pond, turn **left** on a track. Immediately before another interesting cottage, keep **left** through a metal gate into a hay meadow. Cross the meadow diagonally, heading for the corner of a wood 200m away. You pass a large oak on your right and another, a little more scrawny, also on your right. As you approach the corner, Leith Hill and its tower will be visible, giving you sight of your first destination. At the corner of the wood, there is a 4-way fingerpost, partly hidden. Veer **right**, staying in the field close to the wood on your left.
- 2 Soon you reach a pond. Turn **left** over a stile before the pond, as indicated by the hidden fingerpost. Continue ahead over a long wooden bridge with a stile at each end, to a signed fork in the path. Take the **right** fork, straight up the slope of the meadow, heading for a metal gate next to a low cottage with a large solar panel on its roof. *The Georgian façade of Jayes Park dominates the horizon over on your right: this is strictly private!* The foot-path continues through the large metal gate and down a concrete drive.


Veer **right** at the circular wall and continue along the concrete drive between the nineteenth-century buildings of Jayes Park Courtyard, with their Tudor-style chimneys, finials, walled gardens and forge. (*These private premises are now mainly let as business units.*) At this point, the concrete drive changes to tarmac. Exit along this drive and stay on the drive all the way to the main B2126 Lake Road and turn **left**. In 200m, just after a bend, there is a cinder driveway on your right.

-  3 Turn **right** on the driveway, leading to *Sheep Green*. You pass a double cottage, 400-years old and hardly changed from its original condition. Just before a large barn, turn **right** on a track, heading for the hill. After passing a few field boundaries, you reach the corner of a small private woodland plantation. Go past the corner and leave the track (which leads to historic Hindhurst Farm) by veering **right** across the grass. Steer a middle course, heading directly for Leith Hill Tower visible ahead. You pass to the left of an electricity pole and to the right of an oak that juts out into the meadow. After the oak, where you meet a crossing path, go gently uphill on the left-hand side of this large meadow. A glance back gives you a fine view over the Weald of Sussex to the South Downs. [Mar 2020: there was a wire round the field – but not “live”: walkers simply stepped over; gone in May.] Finally, in the top left corner, go through a wooden gate by a National Trust sign for Leith Hill Place.

-  4 You are now in woodland where, in spring, bluebells are plentiful. The path leads over a bridge and up to a marker post. Turn **right** here on a wide track. At the top, on a road near a house, turn **left** for just 40m and turn **right** into the Windy Gap car park. The easiest way for your final ascent really is by the steepest route straight ahead, made easy by the excellent steps recently repaired by the Young Farmers. There are nearly 200 steps with a few level sections and finally you reach the summit. Keep **right** to reach Leith Hill Tower.

 *Leith Hill is the highest point in the south-east corner of England at 294m = 965 feet. The tower was built in 1766 as a dwelling by Richard Hull of Leith Hill Place, who is buried under the tower. It was measured so as to raise the height to the symbolic 1000 feet. It later fell into disuse until 1864 when the side-tower staircase was built and it was fully restored by the National Trust in 1984. The servery has refreshments and nice homemade cakes and is now open every day, closing at 5, or 3 weekdays. You can ascend the tower where there is a view all round with miles of seeming wilderness.*

## Leg 2: Leith Hill to Forest Green

-  5 Facing the view south, turn **right** downhill on the main track continuing past a noticeboard on your left. You will be following this popular main route for 400m. Roughly 200m from the Tower, it's best to use a narrow parallel path on the left to protect you from the careering mountain bikes. After rejoining the main track, stay on the descending track but this time *don't* take a similar parallel path on the other side or you'll miss the next vital fork. The track soon zigzags right-left. But, **before** the zigzag, **leave** the track by forking **left** by an orange-topped post through a low barrier on a narrower path. This path eventually bends left, descends more steeply by a wall and comes down to a road near a road junction. 10m before the road, ignore a left fork.

- 6 Cross the road, go down some steps and turn **right** on another road, following another orange-topped post. (You will be following these orange-tops for some distance, with some purple-tops at the end.) In about 100m, turn **left** at another orange-top into the Rhododendron Wood, proudly identified by its National Trust sign.

*Leith Hill Rhododendron Wood was planted by Caroline, wife of Josiah Wedgwood of pottery fame, who moved here in 1847. The wood is a blaze of colour in late spring. Their home Leith Hill Place (left downhill along the lane), also home to their grandson, composer Ralph Vaughan Williams, is nearby. It is now open during the summer months, Fri-Mon.*

It is worth while extending the walk a little by taking in the side paths, left and right, that criss-cross the wood and give you a better chance to admire the blossoms and mature trees. Keep ahead downhill on a wide path with orange markers. In 200m the walk does a definite **right** bend, passing a meadow and a farm gate visible on your left. Continue on the grassy path, avoiding all turnings off. Soon there is a bench on your left where you can relax and look down on a small pond (where great crested newts have been found, hence the brushwood protection). Finally, the path enters a darker area of tall trees and meets a junction of major paths at a wooden barrier. Turn **left** here on a wide path, still following the orange tops, along the edge of the wood, with a field close by on your right.

- 7 In 200m, at the bottom of the wood, the orange-top walk bends left. **Leave** it here by continuing directly ahead, through wooden barriers, on a rougher path. Continue for 300m, until you reach another wooden barrier. The path meets a wide sandy track coming from the left at a purple topped post. Turn **right** here onto this wide sandy track. The track zigzags and then runs straight for 100m before coming to a junction. Ignore the purple-topped post on your left and turn **right** with the main sandy track. In 50m, where the main track bends left, leave the track by continuing straight ahead on a wide grassy path. A minor path joins from the right as the path bends left. It crosses a bridge over a picturesque stream. It finally joins a wide sandy track coming from the left and immediately reaches a gate, noticeboard, small car park and road. Turn **right** on the road. You pass Collins Farm and shortly approach Forest Green. (For more information about this village, see the other walk in this series [Greensand Hills from the South](#).) Cross the road to the left-hand grass verge and keep ahead till, in 100m, you reach the Parrot Inn.



*The Parrot Inn, about 300 years old, is now a notable gastropub. The pub has a number of real ales poured direct from casks on the counter. The restaurant is eclectic with a modern touch and it uses the home-grown produce in its dishes. Some walkers found the service a bit gruff. Next to the Parrot is the Butcher's Hall and Country Grocer, a quality deli where you can pick out a very decent 3-course takeaway meal at a bargain price and sit outside at the tables to eat it. One Xmas speciality of theirs is real mince pies, i.e. old-fashioned generous sweet-and-savoury pies containing beef !*



### Leg 3: Forest Green to Ockley

- 8 Continue from the *Parrot* along the road. Just after a converted chapel, turn **left** at a fingerpost. Follow the track round to the right and continue past a bungalow. Keep **right** beside the lawn of the bungalow. Your path passes a broken stile and zigzags left-right onto the edge of a field. (In case the fields ahead are waterlogged, return to the road, continue another 400m and

turn **left** on the track mentioned at the end of this section.) In 100m your path veers right to take you over a stile and along the left-hand side of a horse pasture. Cross another stile into the next meadow and go **left** over a hidden stile into woodland. Ford the stream, veer **right** up a bank and ascend a short path to meet a track. Turn **left** on the track which becomes a tarmac farm drive.

- 9 Follow this drive for 500m, all the way to venerable Gosterwood Manor Farm. The drive zigzags right-left round a small historic barn giving you a view behind to the pond and farm house. The drive now bends right round a large modern barn. Where it bends left again, **leave it** by taking a narrow footpath straight ahead past a house and along the right-hand side of a field. Turn **left** at the field corner and, in 30m, turn **right** over two planks and under a bar (easier than the stile) and then **left** to resume your direction in a narrow wood. Cross a drive and resume direction on a path and over a stile. Continue past a farm on a track, passing the attractive oak-beamed *Volvens Cottage*, and onwards to a lane.
- 10 Cross the lane into a field and immediately veer **left** onto a narrow woodland path. Keep to the right-hand side of the wood, eventually going over a stile (avoidable on your left), a wide bridge over a meandering stream and another stile, into a meadow. Go diagonally **right** across this large meadow, passing a clump of trees on your left and later a small fenced-off area on your right. Aim for the stiles and wooden bridge in the far corner which you walked over in section 2. Keep ahead over the stiles-and-bridge, past the lake on the left, over a stile. Turn **right** in the field and follow the edge of the wood on the right until you reach a 4-way fingerpost.
- 11 The final return leg to Ockley is different, although you can retrace the outward route if you like. Turn sharp **right** at the fingerpost. The bridleway goes through a metal gate and over a bridge and then curves left bordering a meadow. When you reach a fingerpost at the end of the first meadow, turn **left** over a stile into the meadow and keep ahead, aiming for the left-hand corner of a cemetery on your right which juts into the meadow. At the far end, go through a wooden gate on the **right** and turn **left** over a bridge across the stream, through small iron gates. Bear **left** past houses which seem to be a converted church. You are now back beside the Green where the walk began.

## Getting there

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By car: Ockley is on the main A29 (Bognor Road) between Dorking and Billingshurst.



By bus: bus Arriva 50 from Horsham station. Check the timetables. Ockley station is far from the village and does not appear to have a bus service. However, there is a footpath leading directly from the station which comes out next to the *Inn on the Green* – a 1.3 mile (each way) extension to the walk.



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