

Walk 4: Ide Hill circular

Glorious woodland that inspired National Trust founder Octavia Hill in Churchill's Chartwell neighbourhood; wonderful views, and a superb NT garden lend this stroll rich atmosphere

How long? 1½ hrs/3.5 miles

Public transport: Nearest rail access is Sevenoaks station from where it is 15 minutes by taxi (about £15) to Ide Hill. There is an infrequent bus service from Sevenoaks station to Ide Hill – the 404, operated by Go.

Parking: easy, by the church (the highest in Kent at 216m)

Start of walk: footpath next to church

Steep slopes? Quite hilly but nothing too arduous

Muddy? One of the worst walks for mud in winter, especially Scords wood/Toys Hill

Walk highlights

Great 'garden of England views' from one of Kent's highest villages; Emmetts gardens; National Trust-managed woodland with fabulous bluebell displays, blossom and foxglove glades in spring. Combine with a visit to Chartwell, Churchill's house and gardens and Westerham; Emmetts Gardens, Bough Beech nature reserve; and Westerham. The Cock Inn is a fine pub in the village and so is The White Hart at nearby Brasted (which is where the Biggin Hill pilots used to go during the Battle of Britain). Covered on Ordnance Survey Explorer 147 map



Between point 1 and 2, looking south

THE WALK IN SHORT

Points 0-1: 650m. Join NT footpath marked Ide Hill next to right of church and walk downhill, past shetland pony pasture on right, joining Greensand Way. Turn right and follow path curving to the right, alongside field on left with barbed wire fence uphill to point 1

Point 1-2: 650m. Turn left at path junction, heading away from village into valley. Cross a little stream by a bridge and climb up other side of valley to Scords wood and point 2

Point 2-3: 650m. Enter woods past NT sign for Toys Hill and follow path uphill for 50m for so then, at a junction, take the path on the right (the Toys Hill red route). Follow this path down steps and various twists and turns. Keep right at the next junction of paths and walk past a large pond (point 3)

Point 3-4 600m. Continue the path uphill behind the pond, ignoring any path off to the left, to the entrance of Emmetts gardens. Enter gardens and follow signs for tea room. Once you hit the main path within the garden (just before tea room), turn right until you see an ornamental pond and rose garden on your right. Walk into this garden and right past pond

Point 4-5: 470m. Just past pond leave Emmetts by a little gate and walk into large meadow. Join the footpath/lane heading downhill on your right by either going through the white gate on your right or walking diagonally across the meadow to the wooden gate in the right hand corner, which you'll probably have to climb over. Go down lane, past tiny cricket pitch and meet Sundridge Rd

Point 5-6: 470m. Turn right up Sundridge Rd – take care, cars are frequent and road is narrow – for 150m then turn left down much quieter Norman St. After 320m take 'hidden' footpath on right through gap in hedge

Point 6-7: 600m. Follow path diagonally through large field, then into a second field. Exit this field by turning left to stile into a playing field. Walk through playing field past playground and to left of large hut to re-enter Ide Hill from behind the Cock Inn



Scord's wood bluebells



The Toys Hill/Ide Hill areas are among the first to be protected by the National Trust, largely through the work of Victorian social reformer and green space campaigner Octavia Hill. There is a seat dedicated to her with a great view, just off the Greensand Way (to the left) on the wooded hillside between Point 0 and 1 on the map.

Like the One Tree Hill walks I've detailed, this walk is on the Greensand Ridge (a sandstone escarpment parallel with the main North Downs chalk escarpment to the north). Walks along the ridge tend to be more extensively wooded than the chalk walks. At Scords wood, huge damage was done by the 1987 storm, as at Knole Park, but the woods has regenerated fast and the NT is leaving some of Scords to itself, to see how the process pans out naturally. In the past there was much coppicing and pollarding of trees here, which is still obvious. The bluebells on Emmett's southern bank are among the most photographed in England. Birds, butterflies, fungi ... all abound.

If you stay at Emmetts for any time, the right thing to do is to



Emmetts Gardens azaleas (point 4)

pay at the main entrance or cafe, but it's fine to pass through on the walk (well, I think it is anyway!). The views as you enter Emmetts are among the best in southern England. The reservoir you can see is Bough Beech. Beyond that is Anne Boleyn's old gaffe at Hever Castle. Emmetts was founded by banker and botanist Frederic Lubbock, whose brother John was Charles Darwin's great friend.

A superb walk in spring, summer and autumn but very muddy in winter, though I suspect the NT will try to improve the paths, as it has behind the ram pump pond.

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