

Walk 11: Knole's wild side

How long? 90 minutes
(3.5 miles)

Public transport: Trains to Sevenoaks station direct from Denmark Hill, Peckham Rye, Nunhead, Catford line and the Charing Cross line via New Cross, Hither Green, Grove Park etc. From station walk (1 mile) or take cab to leisure centre and enter Knole Park there, joining this walk anywhere you like between points 4 and 5

By car/parking: Allow 50 minutes from, say, Brockley. Take the A21; leave it at the Hildenborough exit and drive up Riverhill to St Julian Rd (sharp turning, be careful. Parking in St Julian Rd/Fawkham Wood Rd Start of walk: through gate at this road junction

Steep slopes? Two very short slopes

Buggyable? Much of Knole is buggyable but on this walk on the section between point 4 and the end.

Dogs? Many many deer, so no.

Highlights? Weird, rugged, tussety grassland; huge Tudor mansion; fantastic trees; deer and birds (redstarts, wheatears, goldcrests, firecrests, stock and turtle doves, and green woodpeckers)

Covered on Ordnance Survey Explorer 147 map



THE ROUTE IN BRIEF

Points 0-1 (about 500m) : Enter Knole Park through the gate at the junction of St Julian and Fawke Wood roads. On entering bear right and follow the path heading south to north parallel with the park's eastern boundary. This path isn't always easy to make out but it doesn't matter – soon you'll see a pine plantation ahead of you. Enter it.

Point 1-2 (550m): Very soon after entering pine forest, take path on the left (west) heading down into a valley. Cross a bridge (muddy this bit) over a ditch then follow the path as it bends to the right, uphill. As it leaves the forest the path bends slightly left. Walk across grass to a fallen tree trunk close to a hollow that forms a pond in wet periods.

Point 2-3 (400m): From tree trunk take the path on the right, skirting trees down into the next little valley (the path into the valley straight ahead is a short cut to Knole House, which you can see ahead of you, if you wish). Walk along the valley floor then look for a path (second or third one) on the right, slanting northish uphill through ferns towards trees.

Point 3-4 (550m): Take this path uphill and admire views to the south (the chimneys of Knole House on the horizon) and west. Look for pines up ahead and soon you'll reach a surfaced lane heading back down into the valley (now occupied by a golf fairway).

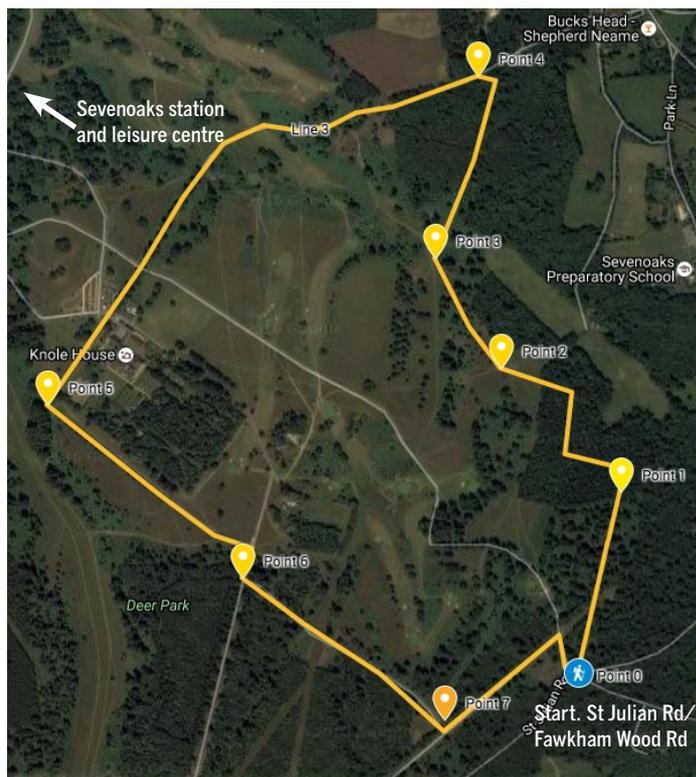
Point 4-5 (1km): Take the lane/track down into the valley then up the shallow slope all the way to Knole House. Walk past the front of the house.

Point 5-6 (650m): Turn sharp left after walking past the house's facade, and follow the garden wall. Keep on beyond it until you hit another surfaced path/track.

Point 6-7 (650m): Turn right on to this track, then immediately turn left onto another surfaced path heading south east back to the starting point.

Point 7-0 (400m): Turn left onto a wide 'drive' called the Chestnut Walk and soon you'll come across the walk's starting point on your right.

Knole Park has been kept in similar condition to how it was soon after the house was built in the late 15th century. The house itself originally was 'acquired' from archbishop Thomas Crammer by Henry VIII, along with Otford Palace, in 1522. The current owners are descendants of Thomas Sackville, a cousin of Elizabeth I, who was given the house by the queen in 1566. It is one of the five largest residences in England and contains historic paintings and furniture such as the Knole Sofa, a throne,



Wonderful trees and grassland in an ancient royal hunting park. Superb at all times of year. The National Trust's Knole House and its cafe are a real bonus just after halfway on a cold day

mentioned by Christopher Marlowe in one of his works.

In popular culture, the place was the setting for two short films by The Beatles in the 1960s, scenes from the fourth Pirates of the Caribbean movie, *The Other Boleyn Girl*, and the second of Guy Richie's *Sherlock Holmes* movies. It was also part of the inspiration behind Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (Woolf was a lover of Vita Sackville West).

The grounds are categorised as, rare, lowland dry acid grassland and are home to a great array of birdlife and a 300-strong herd of fallow and sika deer who disperse around the park and appear at odd moments from the ferns and undergrowth. Superb trees adorn the place, some truly momentous oaks, beeches, yews, cedars and chestnuts with pine plantations, which this walk takes in.

The damage caused by the 1987 hurricane is still pretty apparent in the torn trunks and fallen trees. This has really encouraged a lot of

wildlife – insects, woodpeckers in particular – and led to some lovely open woodland with plenty of light.

My route starts in one of these areas, at one of the (free) southern entrances. After about 500 metres you enter a pine wood (**point 1**) with a darker vibe. Here, goldcrests and coal tits flit among the higher branches of the trees – listen out for the high pitched calls of the former.

At **point 2** walkers will catch their first distant glimpse of Knole House and soon after, in one of the park's lovely and unusual grassy valleys, can admire stout survivors of the Michael Fish hurricane; the stark remains of those that didn't survive are all around you too.

After the tudor glory of the house (**point 5**) and its huge garden wall, there are more great trees viewed from a surfaced path (**point 6-7**). Here, I've seen lizards, grass snakes and weasels dash into the ferns.

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