

Walk 18: Polhill Bank

Darent Valley views; protected chalk grassland with great biodiversity; beautiful woods and village

How long? 4 miles 90 mins Public transport: Direct train to Shoreham (Kent) on London Blackfriars-Sevenoaks line Parking: Shacklands Road verge or Shoreham public car park Start: path off Shacklands Rd Steep slopes? Brief Pub: King's Head/Crown Dogs: OK Pushchairs: no – Knole or Lullingstone best Wildlife? Slow worm, little egret, buzzards etc

THE WALK

Point 1-2: SHACKLANDS RD-MEENFIELD WOOD 160 metres. The walk begins from the wide verge on Shacklands Road just before its junction with the High Street. Enter the woods on the signed footpath, following the path to the right (south), uphill along the line of the valley. Shortly you will reach a fork. Take the right branch, marked Meenfield Woods, and continue uphill through the woods.

Point 2-3: MEENFIELD WOOD-POLHILL BANK 2.5km. The path levels out, running on top of the wooded ridge dividing the Darent

Valley from the Andrews Wood Valley just to the west. It is straight on all the way for a long stretch. You will pass through a pine avenue of trees just after a path junction (go straight on), later passing a field on your left with a great view (you will see this again later). At the path junction at the top of this field continue south (straight on) entering more woods, passing the Pilots Wood sign on your right. The M25 has now become noisier. Eventually the path joins another path coming from the right and then goes past a footbridge over the motorway. After this, the path bends downhill to the left and passes

through a metal gate on to Polhill Bank and a welcome bench with a great view over the head of the valley. Look for Fackenden Down opposite (my walk 19)

Point 3-4: POLHILL BANK-FILSTON FIELD 1.2km. Descend on the path above the Polhill Bank, heading east in and out of the trees, until you reach a large field. Ignore the path through the gate straight ahead, instead turn sharp left (north) in the wooded fringe. Continue past a picnic table and dense vegetation on a steep slope to the left. Soon the path climbs, curving to the left (west) as it steepens. The

path finally reaches a junction you passed earlier (at the entrance to Pilots Wood). Here, turn sharp right (north-east), climbing over a stile, into a hillside field with a great view. Dogs on lead here (sheep).

Point 4-5: FILSTON FIELD-HILLSIDE PATH 800 metres. Descend the field diagonally on the path, passing a bench, then enter the woods through a metal gate. Follow the path heading north, running parallel with the Meenfield Woods path that you followed in the first part of the walk. Continue for about 700 metres until you reach a path crossroads and turn right (on a path with steps downhill to Shoreham).

Point 5-6: HILLSIDE-VILLAGE 700 metres. Descend the hillside (heading east). After 400 metres, pass Shoreham Aircraft Museum and emerge onto the High Street. Turn right, past Honey Pot cafe then take the first left into Church Street. Pass King's Head on the right and cross road bridge over the River Darent, with a war memorial to your left.

Point 6-7-End: VILLAGE-END 1km. Turn left to walk past the war memorial and continue on the tarmac path along the river for about 600 metres. Cross a footbridge with Mill House beyond. Bear left to walk up Mill Lane, past ancient cottages. You will come to a T-junction with the High Street. Cross the High Street (ahead) and take the footpath which bears right along the raised verge opposite. This path leads you along the side of a field back to your car parked on Shacklands Road.

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