THE ROUTE IN BRIEF

Points 0-1 (about 500m): Enter Knole Park through the gate at the junction of St Julian and Fawkham 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 let onto a wide ‘drive’ called the Chestnut Walk and soon you’ll come across the walk’s starting point on your right.

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.

In popular culture, the place was the setting for two short films by The Beatles in the 1960s (I’ve met tourists trying to retrace John and the boys’ steps), scenes from the fourth Pirates of the Caribbean movie, The Other Boleyn Girl, and the second of Guy Richie’s Sherlock Holmes movies – the filming of which I stumbled on during a walk. 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.

amaC49@hotmail.co.uk