Walk 23: Polhill/Pluto 4.2 miles

Explore the Darent Valley between Shoreham and Otford taking in meadows, woods and a steep south-facing nature reserve with a brilliant view. Starts at Shacklands Rd car park.

How long? 1½ hours
4.2 miles (6.8km)
Public transport: Can join the walk from Shoreham or Otford stations but extra km at least... see online instructions.
Start of walk: from Shacklands Rd car park in ‘Shoreham Woods’ just off A224
Steep slopes? Yes, two (one down); fitness and decent knees required.

Walk highlights
Ancient woodland, nature reserve, meadows, birds, butterflies and views
Covered on Ordnance Survey Explorer 147 map
Click here for GPX map

THE WALK
Point 1-2 (1km)
Park in Shoreham Woods (actually Andrews Wood but rebranded). Cross the pedestrian bridge over the M25 into mixed woodland. Follow the path as it bends to the right (south) past a bit of wooden fencing (ignoring the path that goes straight on). Here, the woods become mainly of beech trees. After a couple of hundred metres in the beech woods emerge at a gate into an attractive open woodland area above a dry valley. You are still quite close to the motorway on your right but the noise recedes as you follow the path straight on, heading downhill (rutted in summer; muddy in winter) then cross the valley floor with its little spring, heading east then uphill to join the main Polhill/Meenfield Woods north-south path on the top of the ridge by a large field with a view over the Darent Valley. This is point 2.

Point 2-3 (1km)
Turn right on this path (south) immediately entering Pilots Wood (there’s a sign). Unlike Meenfield Wood, which is beech, this is mixed woodland so more untidy-looking with trees including pines, yew, oak etc. Note a second world war bomb crater on your left (probably of Battle of Britain origin). After a few mins ignore a broad path off to the left after a which actually goes nowhere, and continue straight on south. Soon the motorway noise gets louder and you reach another bridge over the M25. Walk past this – do not cross it – and follow the path downhill to the left, soon emerging onto Kent Wildlife Trust’s Polhill Bank. This is point 3.

Point 3-4 (1.2km)
Take the path straight down the steep hill itself, on its right-hand side. In summer note the profusion of marjoram. At the foot of the hill pass through a gate then follow the path south-east with a hedgerow on your left and meadow on your right. Note the Charing X to Sevenoaks/Hastings railway line emerging from its tunnel on the other side of the large meadow. Cross Filton Lane and continue through a gate south-east admiring the oat houses of Sepham Farm. Soon the path passes this farm’s old curvy brick wall. Just past the farm at a t-junction with a large field of cereal ahead of you, turn sharp right (south-west) then left (south-east) to continue towards Otford. Just before the path enters a small wood, note the path heading north-east towards Filton Farm and Shoreham. This is point 4.

Point 4-5 (1.3km)
At point 4 turn left towards the distant oat houses of Filton Farm. Soon you will come across Pluto... the furthest point of the brilliant scale model of the solar system which starts in the centre of Otford. The path skirts around farm buildings then hits Filton Lane again. Continue north on the grass verge for 200 metres until you reach Water Lane and point 5.

Point 5-6 (1.3km)
Walk up the track opposite Water Lane (heading west), passing through a gate on to a grassy hillside. Now things become steep as we regain the height lost at Polhill Bank earlier. Take it easy and walk up the hill. There are choices: walk all the way up the side of the hill as on the GPX map; or cross the field diagonally to arrive back at point 2 (from where you can walk back to the car park, the way you came, for a short cut). The route on the map and GPX takes the broad top-of-the-ridge path northward through Meenfield Woods. Continue through these lovely beech/yew woods and after about 550m notice a ‘pine avenue’ then a junction of paths (right or straight on for Shoreham; left for Andrews Wood). This is point 6.

Point 6-car park (1km)
Just after the short stand of pines turn left (west), heading quite steeply down through the woods, emerging into the dry valley encountered between point 1 and point 2. Here, the valley is pasture, quite unlike the more shrubby open-woodland-appearance we saw earlier. Cross the valley and then uphill, entering Andrews Wood through a gate. Follow the path through the woods towards the M25. It bends left soon and then you’ll see the bridge back to the car park.

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