



Epsom Downs and Walton-on-the-Hill

Distance: 8½ km=5½ miles

easy walking

Region: Surrey

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Author: Zweigknospe

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Refreshments: Tattenham Corner, Walton-on-the-Hill

Map: Explorer 146 (Dorking) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

Problems, changes? We depend on your feedback: feedback@fancyfreewalks.org

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Woodland, high grassland, secret paths, race course, views

In Brief

Home to the Epsom Races, including the Derby, the chalk Downs are part of the DNA of English life. From here, in April or June you can watch the races for free, but throughout the year the Downs are a free-to-go wonder of butterflies and buttercups. This is not a lonely walk because you will meet hundreds of happy trippers, but it starts quietly and rather mysteriously, revealing its sudden views and a few vast open secrets, which may surprise you, considering how close Epsom is to London.



There are just a few nettles and brambles at the start of this walk, not enough to rule out wearing shorts. The chalky paths make trainers or walking shoes wearable in the summer, although the forest paths could trap some puddles in the wetter months. Your dog is very welcome on this walk, preferably bypassing Tattenham Corner to avoid the only main road.

Nominally, the walk begins at the **Mere Pond** in **Walton-on-the-Hill**, postcode **KT20 7UE** (park on the roadside of Deans Lane near the Blue Ball pub), www.w3w.co/faster.tribal.snacks, or at **Tadworth Railway Station**.



During race meetings (April and June: see the web), you must start at this end, because Tattenham Corner will be choc-a-bloc. The alternative start is **Tattenham Corner** (car park or railway station), postcode **KT18 5PR**,



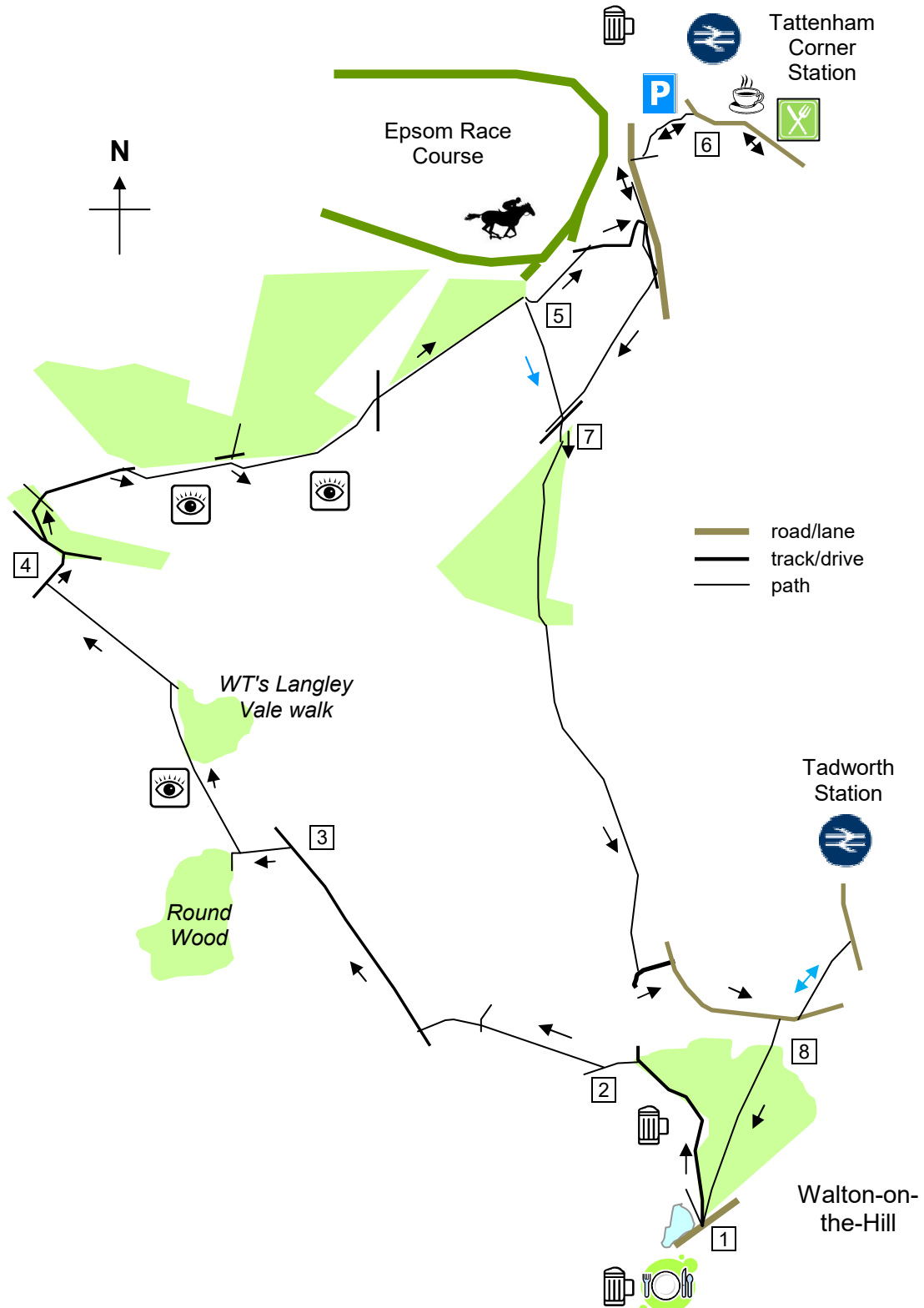
www.w3w.co/straw.crunch.boring. Outside of race meetings, the Mound car park usually has spaces, especially at weekends (cost £3 for the day if the machine is working) and there is roadside parking. If you arrive by train, you can *begin* the walk at Tadworth Station and *finish* at Tattenham Corner station (not the reverse because the western section is more interesting).

Do not come via Epsom Downs station which is a mile away. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

If you are starting at **Tattenham Corner**, start the walk at Section **6**.

If you are starting at **Tadworth station**, walk along the road with the station on your left, keep straight on at a road junction and, in only 30m, turn **right** on a footpath. It leads up between houses to a road, The Avenue. Cross over the road, turn **right** for 30m and go **left** on a woodland bridleway. Start the walk at Section **8**.



The name “Walton” comes from the same Anglo-Saxon root as “Wales” meaning “foreigner”. Its inhabitants were generally wealthy – those who could afford to dig deep wells. Walton Manor House dates from the 1300s and Walton Oaks, just outside the centre, was another country house, the site being occupied by Pfizer the pharmaceuticals firm.

- 1 From the Mere Pond at Walton-on-the-Hill, take a track that runs away from the main road with the pond on your left, in the direction of a sign for the *Bell* pub. Immediately, at a fork, take the **right**-forking track, but **ignore** the signpost on the right pointing to a right-forking bridleway, and stay on the track. At the corner of a little green, keep **right** on the main track. You soon reach a hamlet known as Withybed Corner and a little secluded gem of a pub, the *Bell Inn*, known locally as “The Rat” but no one is sure why. Keep straight ahead on the main track. You pass an old metal barrier and a white coal post. Immediately take the **left** fork, between wooden fences.
- 2 After 100m, go **right** over a stile (*just squeezable*) onto a narrow path. Your path shortly runs between large manicured lawns. You come to a bypassable stile by a 4-way fingerpost. Cross the tarmac drive to go through a (tight) wooden barrier onto another narrow path. You now have your first open views of the Downs and the landscape soon to be under your feet. On your left are the (converted) *Wayside Stables* with their horse mosaic. Two more wooden barriers lead to a tarmac lane. Cross straight over the lane, over a stile, into a meadow which widens as you proceed. Keep near the trees on the left-hand side to end at a stile and a T-junction with a narrow chalky path. Turn **right** on this chalk-white bridleway, an ancient trackway which leads across the Downs (but you will not be walking the whole length). This slightly sunken path is too narrow to walk abreast but otherwise quite comfortable. You need to estimate a distance of 600m (nearly 10 minutes).
- 3 Now look for a generous wooden swing-gate on your left with a “no horses” badge. It is not signed but, as a clue, it is almost opposite the first farm track on your right. Turn **left** through this swing-gate onto a wide path running beside a field on your left. It ends at a corner of Round Wood where the grass path turns **right** past some info and a bench seat incorporating an elaborate wooden sculpture. [\(The narrow path straight ahead into the wood is another local secret, leading on a twisty course across the valley all the way to Sheep Walk – see the “Headley and Langley Vale” walk.\)](#) *You are on part of the Woodland Trust's Langley Vale WWI Centenary Project, a huge network of paths, woodland and wildlife habitats, still expanding, with new trees being planted everywhere.* You have great views to the left, with the spire of Headley church dominating and on each side of this grass path is a wildflower fringe. The many planted trees will mature over the years, making this a forest walk. After 500m, you reach a corner with another wooden sculpture, this one a tribute to HMS Paragon. *This ship was sunk in 1917 in the Dover Strait, with only 9 out of 85 survivors.* Turn **left** here on a wide path which runs diagonally across a new tree plantation, due to be a new forest in the future. The path ends at a wooden swing-gate beside a large metal gate and a T-junction. Turn **right** here on a wide track, known as *Sheep Walk* for obvious historical reasons.
- 4 The track curves left to meet a T-junction with several signposts. Turn **left** on another wide track and, in only 15m, fork **right** at a signpost [\[2020: now disappeared\]](#) on a slightly narrower bridleway uphill. At the top, suddenly you know you have reached Epsom races from the white rails. Keep



straight on at this junction, still going uphill. In 200m, as you reach the trees, near another section of white rail, **leave** the hardcore bridleway by forking **right** onto a path along the grass running parallel to the bridleway but with the open expanse of the Downs on your right. (This walk tries to stay out of the trees wherever possible to give you the benefit of the lovely grass and the wide views. At certain times you may need to keep clear of horses on exercise.) At a junction at the top, keep ahead to a fingerpost, veer **right** to regain your direction on the bridleway, but immediately fork **right**, once again on a parallel path across the Downs. In 450m you come to a junction where a path cuts across your route diagonally, known as Ebbisham Lane. Cross straight over. This time, the bridleway is more open and you don't need to escape the trees. There are plenty of bench seats here to invite a welcome pause. In a further 450m you approach the seven-furlong chute (start point) of the Epsom race course, surrounded by a hedge, bushes and a white rail. A good 10m before the rail, turn **right** in front of the hawthorn hedge. Here you have a choice.

If you did *not* park at Tattenham Corner and do *not* want refreshment and do *not* want to return by rail, keep on straight down the grass on a faint path*, crossing a horse track, down to reach the corner of a wood, crossing straight over a path, a dirt horse track and another path and keep straight ahead on a wide curving (initially) rising woodland path. Now join the main walk at [7]. [*Feb 2024: a walker had to (very carefully!) cross a gallop for horses lined by white railings; the railings may be lifted when you walk; dogs on lead please!] Otherwise ...

- 5 Turn **left** round the side of the hedge. Your path curves right and joins a sandy track, passing the six-furlong chute, curving left towards the road. As you come within a few metres of the road, the track hairpins right. **Leave** the track here by going **left** through gaps in a white rail and walk across the grass parallel to the road. You now have a great view of the famous Epsom Grandstand. Join the road, using the grass verge, for only 30m to a wooden fingerpost. The next part is a local dodge to avoid the road, but if you seek a spacious popular pub, you can stay on the roadside for another 200m to the Tattenham Corner Beefeater (they do veggie lasagne!).



Cross the road carefully at the fingerpost to find a tarmac drive going up past some large black metal gates. Go past the gates and shortly turn **left** across the grassy mound to the top where there are several bench seats with a view. Continue to join a side road and The Mound car park. Tattenham Corner station is on your right. Turning **right** into the shopping street you have a remarkable choice of eateries of every description and a Co-Op.



- 6 From the station or The Mound car park, or returning after refreshment, turn **left** on a minor road (Royal Drive) with The Mound car park on your right. Immediately go **right** across the grass to the top of a grassy knoll where there are several bench seats. From here you can see your walking terrain, with Headley church visible to the left; Epsom Grandstand is on your right with the race course sweeping round.



Racing on Epsom Downs began when riders first dug in their spurs during a spirited dash across the open spaces, but organised racing began in the 1640s with the Merry Monarch Charles II, after years of prohibition under Oliver Cromwell. The Derby started in 1780 on the instigation of the Earl of Derby. The Oaks was the name of his house. Epsom was chosen because it was already a health resort, famous for the Epsom salts. Derby Day became the "Londoners' day out", as depicted in W.P. Frith's painting where the raggle taggle mix with the better-heeled. The most notorious incident was in 1913 when suffragette Emily Davison was fatally trampled by the king's horse.

Veer **left** down to a tarmac driveway and turn **right** past some large black metal gates. Cross carefully straight over the road to a wooden signpost, turn **left** on the roadside verge for 30m and slip through a gap in the fence. Walk across the grass parallel to the road and go through a gap in the white rail to meet a wide horse track at a hairpin. [You could keep straight ahead on the horse track but this walk tries to keep to the wide grassy spaces, thus avoiding riders and bikes, so ...](#) Take a path across the grass, parallel to the track on your left. The path snakes round a bush and wheels right in harmony with the neighbouring track. Straight ahead you can see the spire of Headley church (*there are three Headley walks in this series*). Just before a bank of trees, you meet a crossing path coming down from the right. Turn **left** on it, crossing straight over the horse track and two other paths and take a wide curving ascending path into the trees.

- 7 Your path very gradually rises and falls. Stay on the main path at all times, avoiding the many side paths you pass on both sides. The path passes a series of back gardens, climbing gradually (not for nothing is it called Walton-on-the-Hill). Finally you emerge at a 3-way fingerpost and a semi-tarmac lane. Turn **left** on the lane and, at a T-junction, turn **right** on a quiet residential road, *The Avenue*. In just over 300m, there is a cul-de-sac on your left called *Spindlewoods*.

[If you are returning from Tadworth station, go another 30m, turn left on a footpath and, at the bottom, turn left on a road. Otherwise ...](#)

Turn **right** here at a signpost onto a woodland bridleway.

- 8 Keep straight ahead on a shingle path. After you pass a flint wall and some stumps, you have three possible paths leading ahead. Take the **middle** path, passing a fingerpost on your right. [\(However, if you are willing to miss the pond and larger establishments at Walton-on-the-Hill, the right-hand path will take you direct to the Bell pub, which however does not serve food during the day. Or if the path ahead is particularly muddy, you can take the parallel concrete path to the left all the way to the main road at the end: turn right and you will be back at the Mere Pond.\)](#) Stay on this very wide woodland path, reaching the Mere Pond in another 400m and the road junction where the walk began.



There are opportunities for refreshment here, the nearest being the Blue Ball. The Fox and Hounds is further up Walton Street. The Spaghetti Tree opposite is named after that famous April Fool hoax by Richard Dimbleby and the BBC in 1957.

Getting there

By car: Walton-on-the-Hill can be reached from the A217 Sutton-Reigate road. Turn off at the Tadworth roundabout, taking the road west signposted *Tadworth Walton-on-the-Hill*. Follow this road over a railway bridge, across traffic lights and through woodland, reaching the pond in one mile (1½ km). Turn left and park on Deans Lane.

Tattenham Corner is also reached from the A217. Tattenham Way begins at traffic lights exactly 1 mile south of the big junction where the A2022 (Epsom-Coulsdon) road crosses the A217. Turn **right** into Tattenham Way (or **left** if coming from the Reigate direction). Go straight over the A240 in ½ mile and continue for another ¼ mile.

By train: regular fast service from London Bridge station (a little slower on Sundays).

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