



Okewood Hill Pub Walk

Church-in-the-Woods, Stane Street

Distance: 6 km=3¾ miles or 2¾ km=1¾ miles easy walking

Region: Surrey, W.Sussex

Date written: 20-apr-2015

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Refreshments: Okewood Hill

Map: Explorer 134 (Horsham) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

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

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Pub, woodland, hidden church, meadows, ancient trackways, spring flowers

In Brief

This is a walk with a secret – although you could include the pub as a *second* secret as it is in one of those tucked-away Surrey villages where the picturesque old inn, made from two cottages, with its low beams, is a true delight. The *Punchbowl* in Okewood Hill is now a busy freehouse and it serves *Surrey Hills, Ringwood, Hophead, Hogs Back, Firebird and Carlow* amongst many other brews. The big success though has been the kitchen and the wide-ranging menu which seem to attract visitors from afar. So you may need to book before you come by ringing Becky on 01306-627249. Food is from a lengthy menu of standards, plus bar favourites. By all appearances, they have solved the problem of dining room space by taking over the bar as well. So if you just want a drink you have to greet the diners with a *bon appetit!* or a *Mahlzeit!* and be drawn into conversation possibly. There are tables outside, so that counts as *four* little eating areas. This inn also serves teas and proper coffee. They also have a little shop selling popular groceries and drinks.



What about that *first* secret? Well, you probably know about the hidden *church-in-the-woods*, a gem of Surrey: see the potted history below.



If you would like refreshment *after* the walk, there are the *Cricketers* in Okley and the *Scarlett Arms* in Walliswood.

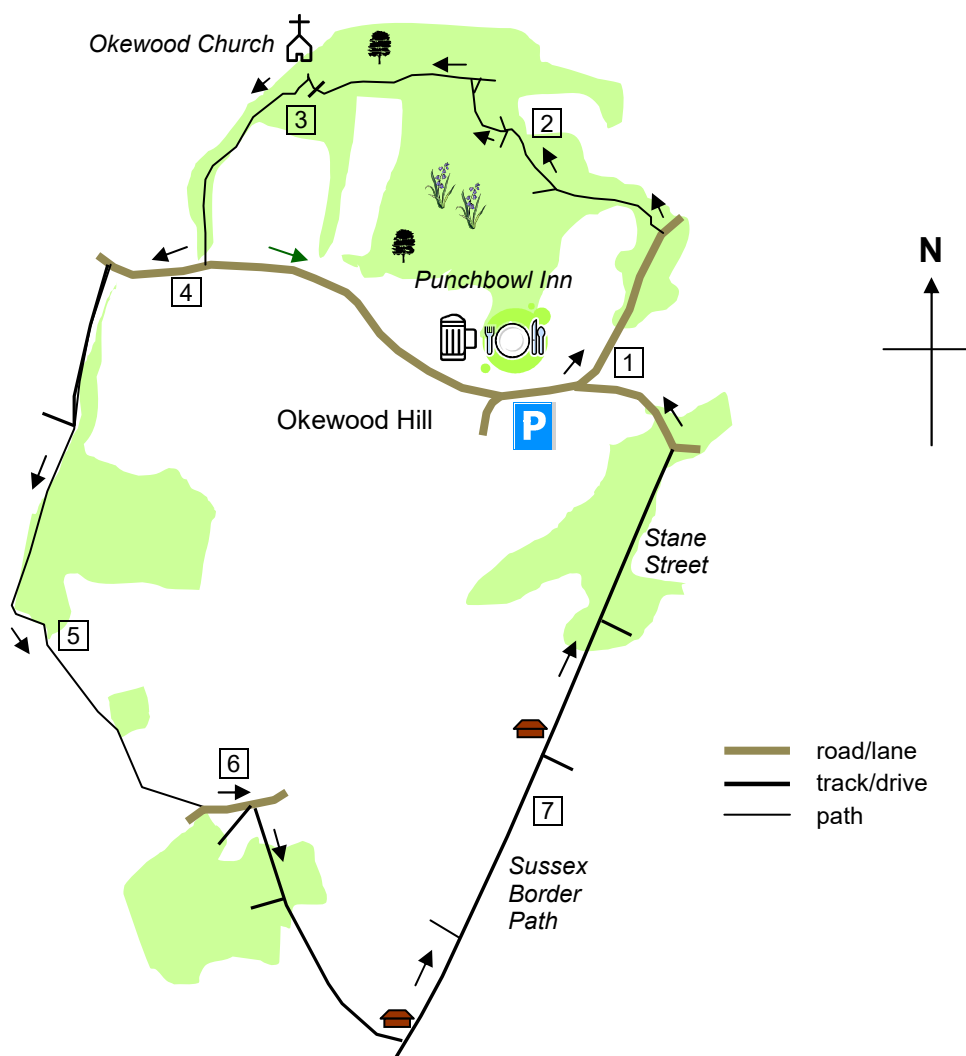
This walk is best in spring or summer, when the paths are dry. In spring especially, you have both the woodland flowers, such as bluebells, but also an amazing display of daffodils on Stane Street just before the end.



There were no nettles or brambles in April but in summer they may shoot up with a vengeance, especially in the farmland near the start. There is a long dry stretch on the lanes and the old Roman road, but the farm land and the woods can be muddy in parts, depending on the season, so it *may* be wise to wear boots, except in very dry conditions. Your dog will also enjoy this walk if he is not too large to be lifted over a couple of the stiles and he is welcome in the *Punchbowl*.

The walk begins in the lay-by opposite the **Punchbowl Inn** at **Okewood Hill**, Surrey (also often spelt Oakwoodhill), postcode **RH5 5PU**. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



- 1** Walk along the road with the pub on your **left** and stay on it as it curves left, ignoring a minor right turn, passing various houses and cottages. Follow the road all the way down. Just before a bridge, turn **left** at a (drunken) fingerpost on a footpath. **In winter the main path can be rather muddy – but your route will now skip most of it.** You will be following the main path but, in 30m, take a narrow parallel path up a bank on your right, far drier and pleasanter. In spring, the floor will be carpeted by flowers, with bluebells prominent but also white wood anemones in profusion and little blue violets. Your path goes down into a valley and over a trickling stream. At a T-junction, turn **left** and **right** to re-join the main path. Continue ahead uphill, once again using the bank on the right, as directed by a yellow arrow on a post [Jan 2022: grounded]. After around a 100m you pass another yellow arrow on a post.
- 2** There is shortly a large meadow visible on your right. You soon arrive at a junction of paths by a post with yellow arrows. Keep straight on here, ignoring a footpath to the right of the post and avoiding narrow paths that

fork off to the left. In another 100m you arrive at a T-junction with a marker post and several arrows just to your left. Turn **left** here. Follow this prominent path gradually uphill, passing a meadow on your left. In no time, you reach the *church-in-the-woods*. As you approach the church, bear **right** to go straight over a driveway and between two redwood trees. Your route is now **sharp left** on a tarmac path opposite two benches at the corner of the church. But first you will want to bide a while to have a look at the church of St John the Baptist.

“A gem in a perfect setting”, but Okewood church was not always hidden away in a forest of oak, beech and hazel. It was once on a major highway near Stane Street (the old Roman road which you follow soon). It is only in recent years with new main roads taking the traffic away that it has become one of the most isolated churches in the South East. It was built about 1220, reputedly on the site of a Roman villa where earlier a Druidic temple had stood. In 1431 a local man Edward de la Hale endowed the church generously. Legend has it that once, on a boar hunt with his son, the lad fell from his horse and was about to be gored by an enraged boar when, as if from Heaven, an arrow whizzed through the air and slew the animal. In 1547, the church was wrongly classified as a chantry chapel, i.e. one that says occasional masses for the dead rather than a proper church, and was seized along with the monasteries during the reign of Henry VIII. Restored by petition and decree, it later became a full parish church in 1853. Inside are many items of interest, including the de la Hale Brass showing a man-at-arms with the badge of the House of Lancaster, some wall paintings – survivors from a much larger set – and some ancient glass in the lancet windows.



- 3 Having taken that sharp left turn, passing a large mourning angel on your right, head in the direction of a small redbrick building which serves as a church hall. But 20m short of the building, before another wooden bench that sits peacefully under a tall cedar, turn **right** on a faint and very narrow path, through what remains of an old kissing-gate, following a yellow arrow. A meadow comes into view on your right. Your path soon bends to the right and then widens. It now goes along the right-hand side of a sloping meadow. As you near the barns, stables and outbuildings belonging to Chapel House Farm, ignore a private gate on your right and continue straight ahead, as directed by a fingerpost. Soon you are walking parallel to a tarmac drive on your right. Finally, at the top, a small wooden gate takes you out to a road. *Behind you is a good view of Leith Hill with its Tower (see the many other walks in this series).*



Decision point. For a very short walk of 2¾ km=1¾ miles, turn **left** on the road for 750m, passing the historic houses of Okewood Hill such as *Upper Sent*, keeping **left** at a junction, to return to the pub. Otherwise ...

- 4 Turn **right** on the road. In 200m, just before a house, go **left** at a fingerpost on a bridleway signed *Rosehill Farm*. Keep to the path furthest on the left which bypasses the various farm buildings and clutter, then zigzag right-left to continue along the left-hand side of a long rough meadow. Your path goes through a strip of hawthorn and along the left-hand side of the next field. At the corner, ignore a bridleway right and continue ahead on a foot-path, as directed by a fingerpost, passing woodland on your left. At a 3-way fingerpost, avoid a junction on your left. Shortly after that, you arrive at a wooden fence and a stile which has a blue insulated wire. After the stile,

turn **left** in this large field, diverging away from the fence and heading for a gap. Here, cross over a small brick barrel bridge, followed immediately by a stile.

5 Cross this awkward stile carefully. [Aug 2017-2022: this stile is a problem if you have a large dog or if you have short legs, because of the wire fence and the (insulated) barbed wire at the top; please be very careful !] Your path now zigzags a fraction right-left to go up the left-hand side of a large meadow. It now runs across another pasture and along its left-hand edge. In the far corner, go over a wide concrete bridge and a stile and into another meadow. Cross the meadow diagonally **left**, heading for a wide exit gate on the other side. Here, go over another stile to a road.

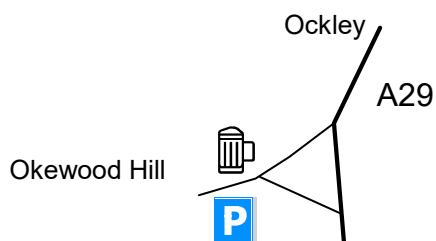
6 Turn **left** on the road and, in nearly 100m, go **right** by a red-tiled gatehouse. Avoid the first footpath sharp right by *Tanglewood* and take the **second** path, a tarmac lane, signed as a bridleway to *Monks Farm and Honeybush Farm*. You are now on part of the *Sussex Border Path (SBP)*, a 150-mile long-distance path. After 200m, at a 3-way fingerpost, ignore a bridleway on the right and continue ahead beside a solid metal gate for Monks Farm. You are now entering West Sussex for a short section. Follow the tarmac drive. When you reach the big red-tiled farmhouse, turn **left** at a T-junction on a byway. This long straight course is the Roman road *Stane Street*, running from London to Chichester. In 350m, after a small gate (now just a gap), ignore a footpath on the left and stay on the nice wide dry path, going gently uphill.

7 A more robust gate leads to a surfaced farm drive at a bend: keep straight on, thus leaving the SBP, passing a house *Ruckmans* on the left, with great views right. The drive passes some older buildings and descends through a beautiful forest of holly and yew. Ignore a footpath right, now back in Surrey. In spring, the woods are full of daffodils, and the banks of celandine and primroses. You pass along an avenue of trees, which leads you finally through open wooden gates in a wall, out to a road. Turn **left** on the road and, at a junction, turn **left** back to the *Punchbowl Inn* where the walk began.



Getting there

By car: Okewood Hill is signposted off the A29 (Bognor Road), just over 1 mile south of Ockley, about 8 miles south of Dorking. (On the sign it has its alternate spelling *Oakwoodhill*.) The pub is reached in half a mile. Park in the lay-by opposite.



By bus: bus E573 from Horsham? Check the timetables (or ring the pub).

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