



Farnham to Godalming walking guide

Why not take the train and discover the beauty of the South West Trains patch on foot? Put on stout boots and heads into the lovely Surrey countryside for a great day out.

Just an hour from London by train, the walk from Farnham to Godalming is a perfect day outdoors, combining fresh air, walking and gourmet food in a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Starting from the 800-year-old market town of Farnham, this walk passes along river meadows, woodland paths and sandy bridleways to Godalming. The route takes in the ruins of 12th-century Waverley Abbey and bridge, Moor Park House, Peper Harow Park, the River Wey and glimpses of chocolate-box cottages and Lutyens-inspired homes.

Exit Farnham station and cross the railway tracks to head downhill on Station Hill Road. The Q8 petrol station is on your right and, after about 220 yards, you come to the A31 intersection. Instead of crossing here and skirting Farnham, as the Time Out Book of Country Walks suggests, look out for the North Downs Way finger post, partly obscured and to your right at the junction of Station Road and the A31. Follow the North Downs Way marker that soon leads to a gravelled lane that crosses the meadows by the River Wey, where you are likely to see deer, and eventually it reaches Moor Park House and the Heritage Trail.

Walking along the former carriage drive, now a shaded woodland path, you'll pass defences from World War II, a middle-Stone Age camp and caves, and a nature reserve. Moor Park House (01252 734477, open by appointment) is where Jonathan Swift (author of Gulliver's Travels) worked as secretary to Sir William Temple in the late 17th century.

Leaving the grounds, you pass Stella's Cottage (the home of Swift's best friend, Esther "Stella" Johnson) and the ruins of Waverley Abbey, the first Cistercian monastery built in England, which are about a quarter of a mile away. If you pass Keepers Stud, retrace your steps to take the byway.

The track passes the impressive pleached beech hedges at Tilhill House and descends to Tilford, with the Barley Mow pub to the right. To the left is the village post office (closed afternoons Wednesday and weekends), which sells snacks and ices. Continue uphill to a blind corner and Caesar's Corner House and take the right-hand tarmac path across the road.

Follow the yellow public footpath signs forking right at Archers Hill House, skirting Pooh Corner House, and at the tarmac road go right, downhill, with Highmead House to your left. Fork left, uphill, at Whitmead House and continue for about half a mile before you pass West Wey House and fork right, downhill, to The Donkey pub at Charleshill, a few hundred yards later.

A walker's lunch at The Donkey (reservations advised) isn't a soggy sandwich affair. Maybe it's the effect of a leisurely lunch, but walking in the afternoon always takes more effort. After Fulbrook Farm carefully follow the directions, keeping between the specimen oaks to your left and the telegraph cables to your right. Cresting the ridge of the field, climb the five-bar gate framed by two oaks. Bear hard left to cross the wooden railed bridge.

Continue through to the entrance of Peper Harow Park, despite the "no thoroughfare" notice (it is a public footpath), passing the estate church and cottages and the imposing façade of the main house, which has been converted into luxury flats. From here the bridleway route to Godalming crossing behind the cricket club pavilion is well signposted.

Entering on Borough Road, walk uphill to the Old Town Hall building (shaped like an antique pepper pot), with a plaque to mark the world's first public street-lighting scheme in 1881, to arrive at the High Street and teatime refreshments. Signs by the Old Town Hall, in black and gold, direct you to Godalming train station. On your way, don't forget to look above the shop fronts at the wonderfully erratic brickwork on buildings dating from the 1700s.