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Amberley Circular

The Arun river meadows, an ancient estate and a fine ridge walk

Length: 18.3km (11.4 miles)

Toughness: 5 out of 10: mainly flat, with one long but well-graded hill climb

Maps: OS Landranger 197, Explorer OL10 (formerly 121)

Features

This walk has the same finish along the crest of the South Downs as the Billingshurst to Amberley and Pullborough to Amberley walks on this website, but it takes in a slightly longer section of the ridge than those other two walks (5km or 3.1 miles). It also has a more varied and interesting climb up on the downs.

The morning is flat, first passing through the river meadows of the Arun to the picturesque village of Amberley, and then following a route along the foot of the downs, with fine views up onto the ridge one way, and down onto the marshland of Amberley Wild Brooks the other. You get a brief taste of the Brooks, before passing through the park of a stately home, Parham House, and to lunch in Cootham.

After lunch there is a long but reasonably well-graded climb up onto the downs (which is what earns this a toughness rating of 5 out of 10), and then there is an easy walk with fine views along the top of ridge, ending with a descent to Amberley.

This is a good all-season route, with the only potential problem being the short section crossing the meadows from the River Arun to Amberley village, which can be very wet or even flooded in winter. See the start the walk directions on page 2 for an alternative

Transport

Amberley is on the Horsham-Littlehampton line, served by hourly trains out of **Victoria**. Note that Amberley has a short platform and you can only alight from the front five carriages of the train.

From September to March, **catch the nearest train to 9.10am** from Victoria. This will get you to the Crown Inn in Storrington in time for lunch. In summer, you could take a train an hour or even two hours later and have lunch at one of the earlier lunch options, reserving the Crown Inn for tea.

Lunch

The Crown Inn (01903 742625) Cootham, 8.4km (5.2 miles) into the walk, is the best located lunchtime pub for this walk. It serves food from 12pm to 2.30pm Tuesday to Saturday, and 12pm to 3.30pm on Sundays. It is a good idea to ring in advance to book a table, as this pub always seems to be busy, though in summer you may be able to find an unbooked table in its garden. It is open all afternoon for drinks a the weekend.

Earlier options include the **Black Horse** (01798 831183) in the heart of Amberley, 3.2km (2 miles) into the walk, which is open 9am to 10pm daily and serves food 12-2pm and 6-8.30pm Mondays to Saturdays and 12-6pm Sundays. It also has a Garden Room serving tea and coffee.

The **Amberley Village Tea Room** (see **Tea** below) just down the road from the Black Horse also provides light lunches.

800 metres further on, on the road out of the village, 4km (2.5 miles) into the walk is the **Sportsman** (01798 831787) a modern pub with a lovely view of Amberley Brooks. It is open 12-3pm and 5-10pm Wednesday to Friday, all afternoon on Saturday, and to 5pm on Sunday.

Tea

The Riverside Tea Room and Gardens (01798 831066) has a fine riverside location (with both inside and outside tables) just beyond Amberley station, but is only open to 4pm, Wednesday to Sunday. If you can get there in time, it offers a good selection of cakes.

Also highly recommended, and reached by a small diversion off the route (see paragraph 71 on page 6), is the **Amberley Village Tea Room** (01798 839196), a charming and friendly tea room in the village of Amberley, next door to the Black Horse pub. It is open until 5pm daily except Wednesday from Easter to the end of September, but at weekends only from March to Easter and in October. It is closed November to February.

Otherwise, the friendly and atmospheric **Bridge Inn** (01798 831619) just beyond Amberley station serves tea and coffee until at least 10.30pm, and is also a great place for dinner, with outside tables in summer.

WALK DIRECTIONS

Amberley station to Amberley village (3.2km/2 miles)

*In **winter** the crossing of the water meadows in paragraph 7 overleaf can be **very wet underfoot** or even **flooded**. It can be **avoided** by turning right out of the station and following the main road for 1.3km to Amberley village: in more detail: In 150 metres the road curves left and there is a footpath parallel to it to the left. In another 250 metres ignore a minor road uphill to the right. The road then crests a hill and makes a long curve to the right, coming in 850 metres to a minor crossroads. Turn left here up a side road into Amberley village. In 200 metres you pass the Amberley Tea Room on your right. In 100 metres more you pass the Black Horse on your right and turn right beyond it. Continue with the directions in paragraph 14. This route is **1.6km/1 mile shorter** than the main walk route.*

1. Coming off platform two (the platform if you are coming from London) at Amberley station, turn left down the station approach.
2. In 50 metres cross the main road with care and turn left under the railway bridge. Just after the bridge, take a footpath to the right up a wide gravel track. In 50 metres pass to the left of a metal fieldgate.
3. Curve left with the path around a caravan park. In 100 metres, climb up onto a grass embankment and veer left along the River Arun.
4. In 200 metres pass through a kissing gate. In another 100 metres ignore a footbridge to the left.
5. In 30 metres pass through a kissing gate and stay on the riverbank as it curves right.

6. In 600 metres cross a stile and keep on along the riverbank.
 7. In another 600 metres, when level with houses and a church visible through the trees on the other side of the river, at a two-armed footpath sign, **turn right across the fields**, heading for a fieldgate (or a fieldgate-sized gap). This section can be **boggy underfoot in winter**.
 8. In 180 metres pass through the fieldgate (or gap) and in another 150 metres pass through another fieldgate (or gap). Veer slightly to the left across the next field.
 9. In 120 metres pass through a kissing gate to the right of a gate, and beyond it follow a path with a hedgerow to your right and a ditch to your left.
 10. In 200 metres cross the railway line. Beyond it ignore a track slanting right uphill and instead keep straight on through a metal gate, onto a path with a bank to the right and a wire fence to the left.
 11. In 200 metres you pass **Amberley Castle** (now a hotel) on your right. Keep on down the side of it, and in 60 metres carry on down a road into **Amberley village**.
 12. Keep straight on through this extremely picturesque village. In 250 metres, ignore a no-through gravel road to the left. 80 metres further on, beyond a thatched cottage called Old Place, and opposite a signposted footpath right, take a tarmac road left.
 13. In 60 metres follow the road around to the right. In 100 metres you come to a road junction, with the **Black Horse** pub ahead. The **Amberley Village Tea Room** is 120 metres to the right here.
- Amberley village to Parham Park (3.1km/1.9 miles)**
14. Keep straight on up the street to the left of the Black Horse and ignore ways off.
 15. In 400 metres the houses end and you have a fine view to the right of the South Downs ridge that you will be walking along later, and to the left of the flat marshlands of **Amberley Wild Brooks**.
 16. In 200 metres there are more houses to the left and in 200 metres more you pass the **Sportsman** pub on the left, a possible early lunch stop.
 17. Stay on the road along what is a rather suburban stretch. In 500 metres you pass the last house on the left ("Whiteoaks"), its upper storey clad in brown timber, and the road starts to descend.
 18. Just beyond the end of this house, and just before a "no speed limit" road sign (a white circle with a black band across it), **veer left through a big gap in the hedge**. to descend diagonally downhill across a field.
 19. In 370 metres, at the far end of the field, pass through a gap in the hedge. In 20 metres go over a plank bridge with a wooden rail. Keep straight on to a stile 90 metres away in the field corner.
 20. Cross the stile and a two-plank bridge and keep straight on, with a wire fence to the left. In 70 metres cross a stile and a plank bridge to enter a wood.
 21. In 100 metres cross a stile into a field. Pass to the right of a barn and curve left past a two-armed footpath sign and then cross a stile to the right of a metal fieldgate. Beyond, keep straight on, ignoring metal fieldgates to your left.
 22. In 170 metres cross a footbridge and turn right at a three-armed footpath sign onto a gravel track. Follow this for 300 metres to a road. (At the road notice the curious chapel-like building - actually Rackham Old School - on your right.)
 23. Turn left uphill on the road. In 150 metres ignore a road to the left signposted to Coldwaltham and Greatham.
 24. In another 130 metres turn right through the gates of **Parham Park**, following a footpath sign. (Ignore the estate signs saying "No access to the House and Gardens" and "No vehicular right of way": this is a public footpath.)
- Parham Park to Cootham (2.2km/1.4 miles)**
25. Follow the tarmac drive through the estate. In 400 metres you come to a lake on your right and can see **Parham House** on the far side of it. Keep on the road, with the lake to your right.

26. In 170 metres, at the far end of the lake, the road climbs uphill with an iron fence and later a stone wall to the right. After 150 metres the wall veers right and becomes brick, but you keep straight on along the road.
 27. 120 metres beyond this point you come to a road T-junction, with a round house visible to your right. Cross this T-junction and keep straight on across the grass on a signposted path.
 28. Curve slightly right with the grass path to pass an oak tree in 100 metres and keep straight on.
 29. 100 metres beyond the oak tree, bear left along a raised bank under a line of trees, parallel to a tarmac drive to the right.
 30. In a further 100 metres you pass a two-armed footpath sign and join the tarmac drive, which soon curves right.
 31. In 300 metres this brings you to the eastern gates of the Parham Estate. Follow the drive straight on for another 200 metres to emerge onto a main road, the A283.
 32. Keep on in the same direction down the right-hand verge of the A283. In 100 metres ignore Clay Lane to the right. A further 200 metres brings you to the **Crown Inn**, the recommended lunchtime pub, on the left-hand side of the road.
- Cootham to the top of the downs (3.7km/2.3 miles)**
33. Coming out of the pub after lunch turn right onto the A283 (that is returning the way you came before lunch). In 100 metres turn left up Chapel Lane, following a footpath sign, next to Cootham Village Hall.
 34. In 50 metres bend right with the road, passing houses on the left. In 80 metres, beyond the houses, go left on a part tarmac track.
 35. In 50 metres, where the track ends, pass through a gap behind a brick garage and veer right across a field.
 36. In 250 metres leave the field and cross a footbridge. In 30 metres emerge into another field and carry on down its left-hand edge.
 37. In 60 metres follow the path as turns right between gardens and then curves left again.
 38. In 100 metres you come to a road, where you turn right.
 39. In 80 metres carefully cross a main road. On the far side take the right-hand tarmac lane – Kithurst Farm Road – following a footpath sign.
 40. In a further 120 metres, 20 metres before the farm, turn left at a three-armed footpath sign down a path between wooden fences.
 41. In 180 metres you come to a residential road, where you turn right.
 42. In another 200 metres, where the road ends at the top of the hill, pass through a gap in the hedge and turn right down a private drive. In 10 metres fork left onto a signposted footpath, separated from the drive by a fence.
 43. In 100 metres there is an open field on your right and fine view of the Downs. In 200 metres ignore a signposted path to the left. In another 20 metres cross a plank bridge and keep straight on.
 44. In 180 metres cross another plank bridge and pass through a gate into a field. Head straight uphill towards the downs, aiming to the left of an oak tree on the field edge 120 metres away.
 45. Beyond the oak tree keep on uphill along the field edge with a hedge to your right.
 46. In 250 metres, just before a house, cross a stile in the corner of a field, and keep straight on, with the field edge now to your left.
 47. In 80 metres turn left through a gap in the fence and right onto the gravel drive of the house.
 48. In 20 metres more, at the end of the drive, turn left at a three-armed footpath sign onto a track.
 49. In 150 metres the track curves left, and in another 50 metres, just before Greyfriars Farm, at a three-armed footpath sign, **turn sharp right**, to ahead almost back the way you came, with a tree boundary to your right. You are now heading straight for the downs once again.

50. In 170 metres pass through a wooden gate and in another 20 metres curve left with the path.
51. In another 70 metres, at a footpath post, ignore a fork left, and a minor path going steeply uphill to the right, to keep on the main path as it starts to climb uphill in a cutting.
52. In 100 metres, at the top of the cutting, ignore a minor path that keeps inside the trees and instead follow the wider path that slants to the left of the trees, climbing slightly across the slope of the hill.
53. In 180 metres the path curves more to the right, more steeply uphill, and in 80 metres turns to go directly uphill. It now goes into a groove, but you may find it easier to walk on the raised grassy bank to the left of it.
54. In 250 metres, near the top of the hill, where the gradient eases and the path curves left to the ridge line, **fork right up a grassy gully**.
55. In 80 metres this brings you up to a circle of grassy hummocks around a hollow. Keep straight on over the hummocks, with the hollow to your left.
56. In 100 metres this brings you to a fence at the top of the ridge, where you turn right.

Top of the downs to Amberley station (6.1km/3.8 miles)

57. In 80 metres go through a gate. In another 100 metres you pass a trigonometry point (a stone column), marking the top of **Kithurst Hill**. (*Just beyond this you have an interesting view of the **Isle of Wight** half left on a very clear day.*)
58. Carry on, soon starting to descend gently. In 500 metres keep straight on at a junction marked by a four-armed footpath sign.
59. In a further 500 metres, where the path ends in a green open space (a car park) **turn left** for 30 metres along a barbed wire fence, and then pass through a gate to turn right onto a track.
60. You are now on the **South Downs Way**, and can follow it for the remainder of the walk (it goes all the way to the main road, the B2139, that leads to Amberley station), but note the diversion indicated below by **[*]** which also gives you better views.
61. In more detail: Keep on past the car park, ignoring a track to the right in 60 metres.
62. In another 850 metres, after a long gentle climb, you enter a wood, and in 100 metres you emerge from its far side. Ignore a fork to the left here, taking the right-hand fork to stay the South Downs Way, still a track..
63. **[*]** In another 100 metres **fork right** through a kissing gate onto the Springhead Estate, a new open access area. Walk forward for 50 metres to two thorn trees and then curve left to follow the crest of the ridge.
64. Keep along the edge of the ridge, keeping the South Downs Way about 100 metres to your left. In 750 metres the ridge starts to descend and you get a magnificent view of the Arun River and its floodplain below.
65. In another 150 metres cross a stile to the left of a metal fieldgate, and carry on directly parallel to the South Downs Way across a barbed wire and electric to your left. In 30 metres pass to the left of a hummock.
66. Just beyond the hummock, if you want you can cross the stile ahead and stay on the access land for another 800 metres, rejoining the South Downs Way through the kissing gate at the point marked **[**]** below.
67. Otherwise, turn left through the gate just beyond the hummock, and then turn right to rejoin the South Downs Way. On the next section of the path, look left for **a fine view of Arundel Castle**, roughly to the south west, which at this time of day should be a silhouette against the edge of the downs.
68. In 900 metres, ignore a kissing gate to the right **[**]** to go through a wooden fieldgate and carry on downhill more steeply.
69. In 350 metres, on a shoulder of the hill, where a track joins from the left, keep straight on.
70. In 50 metres more **veer right off the track** onto a path between fences, following the South Downs Way signpost.

- 71.** In 300 metres pass through a gate and in 70 metres more descend to a road, where you go right. Follow the road around to the left. In 80 metres you come to a fork.
- **To visit the Amberley Village Tea Room**, *fork right* here, and refer to paragraph 75 below.
 - **To continue the walk without going to Amberley Village Tea Room**, *fork left* (that is keep straight on) at the fork and continue with the directions in the next paragraph.
- 72.** In 600 metres the left fork brings you down to a main road, the B2139. Cross it with care and go left along the pavement.
- 73.** In 250 metres follow the road as it curves right, and in 150 metres, just before the railway bridge, you see the entrance to the **Amberley station** on your left. At the station cross the footbridge for London-bound trains,
- 74.** For the **Bridge Inn** keep on under the railway bridge and turn left immediately beyond it through a garden gate, which takes you directly to the pub. For the **Riverside Tea Room**, stay on the right-hand side of the main road for another 70 metres or so.
- 79.** In 170 metres cross the railway line and carry on between fields.
- 80.** In 300 metres you emerge onto the open watermeadows and turn left, following the South Downs Way arrow.
- 81.** In 250 metres you come to the bank of the River Arun, where you leave the South Downs Way and go left along the riverbank.
- 82.** In 30 metres pass through a kissing gate. In 200 metres more, just before a bungalow ahead, veer left with the embankment, and in 20 metres veer right to leave the embankment and carry on down a track, with some caravans to your right.
- 83.** In 180 metres you come to a road. The **Riverside Tea Rooms** are to your right and the **Bridge Inn** straight ahead (you can get to it through the small wicker gate on the far side of the road).

To get to **Amberley railway station** turn left under the railway bridge to find the station approach immediately beyond it to the right.

Diversion to Amberley Village Tea Room

*This route is **2.8km/1.8 miles**, adding **1.7km/1.1 miles** to the walk length for the full route or **2.2km/1.4 miles**, adding **1.1km/0.7 miles** for the main road option.*

- 75.** Having forked right at paragraph 71 above, follow the quiet lane downhill for 400 metres to the main road.
- 76.** Cross the main road and carry on up the road beyond into the village. The tea room is in 200 metres on the right.
- 77.** **After tea**, the easiest way to get to Amberley station is to retrace your steps to the main road and turn right on it.
- 78.** The main road brings you in 1.3km to **Amberley station** and there is a footway all the way. But a somewhat nicer alternative, which is 600 metres longer, is to turn right off the road after 600 metres up a track which is signposted as the South Downs Way.