

Thames Down Link

Follow all, or part, of this fifteen mile walking route linking the Thames Path National Trail in Kingston to the North Downs Way National Trail near Westhumble; hence the name, Thames Down Link. Explore the history and the countryside along this green corridor which joins the urban area of Kingston with the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. (The Link is also known as the Hogsmill Walk in Kingston).

The route is described from the north, Kingston, to the south, Westhumble, but can be followed in either direction and started at any of the access points along the way. So you don't have to walk it all at once! It is marked by signposts and waymarks bearing the Walk's logo. Allow a full day to walk the whole route in one direction. Boots or stout shoes should be worn as some paths may be muddy.

The route starts at Kingston Bridge on the River Thames. Here it joins with the Thames Path National Trail, a 180 mile route, which follows the River Thames from its source to the Thames Barrier. The northern quarter of the Thames Down Link also overlaps with the London LOOP, a 150 mile walk encircling London. The route of the LOOP can be followed to the west from here via Bushy Park.

1. *Start the Thames Down Link from below Kingston Bridge on the Kingston town side of the river.*

The current Kingston Bridge was designed by Edward Lapidge and opened in 1828, to replace a previous wooden bridge.

Follow the river embankment upstream past The Bishop and The Gazebo to turn left down Kings Passage, a narrow path, which comes out beside Woolworths in the Market Square. Turn right to reach the High Street, which you should follow to your right to reach a zebra crossing opposite the police station.

2. *Take some concrete steps down to your right before crossing over, to view the mediaeval stonework arches of the ancient Clattern Bridge over the Hogsmill River. The name derives from the sound of horses' hooves as they crossed the bridge. On the opposite side of the road, next to the Guildhall, is the Coronation Stone of the Saxon Kings.*

Cross over and follow the banks of the Hogsmill River alongside the police station. Continue under the wing of a brick office building, the Council Offices, to reach Kingston Hall Road. Cross over using the pedestrian crossing and follow the pavement around to the left to reach Penrhyn Road. Cross over using the pedestrian crossing. Follow the path directly in front to join the riverbank again by Watersplash Close. Follow the path to come out in Denmark Road. Turn left along Denmark Road, then left into Springfield Road. Take the path beside the river on the right before the bridge. At the end turn left to cross the river over two bridges and then turn right to follow the river past the Swan public house. The path continues to meet Villiers Road. Turn right and cross the road at the first zebra crossing.

3. *Just before the river passes under the road, look left to see an 18th century Georgian house. This was the mill house for Leatherhead Mill, one of several watermills on the Hogsmill in Kingston.*

Continue along Villiers Road to turn left into Lower Marsh Lane. Continue along the Lane to come out by Berrylands Station. Go straight ahead up Chiltern Drive and turn left down Surbiton Hill Park to reach the Hogsmill River Park. Follow the path towards the Hogsmill River and turn right by a concrete footbridge. Continue along the riverbank and cross a

wooden footbridge over the Tolworth Brook. Bear left to reach the banks of the Hogsmill and follow these all the way through the meadows to reach the A3.

4. *The Hogsmill River Park* used to flood before the meandering Hogsmill River was straightened in the 1960s. Now a Local Nature Reserve (LNR), it forms an attractive area, with willows arching over the water and varied plant life along the riverbanks, such as meadowsweet and comfrey. The good water quality supports three-spined sticklebacks, minnows and stone loach.

The A3 should be crossed using a subway just up the road to the right. Turn left out of the subway and follow the pavement to cross the river and take a small gate to the right to follow the river through some more meadows, which form the southern part of the Hogsmill River Park.

5. *The route crosses* several old hedgelines, which mainly consist of elm scrub. These hedges were once dominated by mature elm trees, now destroyed by Dutch Elm disease.

Continue straight over a tarmac path to pass under a railway bridge. Follow the path around to the left up a hill. At the top turn right through a wooden gate and pass the Church of St John the Baptist.

6. *The church of St John the Baptist* has Saxon foundations and some mediaeval stonework, but evidence of an iron age settlement suggests an even older history of habitation in the area.

At the road turn right and cross after 50 yards to take the footpath on the opposite side. Follow this to meet Barrow Hill and carry straight on down Royal Avenue. Continue along the path to meet Grafton Road. Turn right and follow the road downhill to turn right down Cromwell Road to reach the Hogsmill public house. Cross over Old Malden Lane into a lane opposite. Cross over the river and turn immediately left along the path beside the river. Follow this all the way to Kingston Road. Cross this road carefully at the traffic lights to your left. (If you wish to follow the London LOOP to the east follow the path to the left before the river). Cross back over the river and again turn immediately left to follow the path by the river. You have now walked 5 miles from Kingston Bridge.

7. *This is Tolworth Court Farm*, which has existed since Mediaeval times. It is now managed for quiet recreation and nature conservation by the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames and the Lower Mole Project. Just before you reach the first hedge, the Hogsmill River is joined by the Bonesgate Stream. The Hogsmill continues to the centre of Ewell, but our route now follows the Bonesgate Stream.

Continue along the same side of the stream to meet a surfaced path that crosses your route, turn left on to this and over the footbridge. Turn sharp right to follow the stream all the way to Chessington Road. Cross over the road carefully and continue on the left hand side of the Bonesgate Stream to Filby Road. Cross over and go through the gate in the dip into Castle Hill.

8. *This area is the Bonesgate and Castle Hill LNR.* Castle Hill, a Scheduled Ancient Monument, is probably the remains of a moated farmstead dating from the 13th century. Follow the surfaced path through Castle Hill, as it winds through the wood to emerge on to a track in Horton Country Park.

9. Horton Country Park was established in 1973, when Epsom and Ewell Borough Council purchased 400 acres of land. Previously farmed by the surrounding psychiatric hospitals, the Park is a rural landscape of great historical and wildlife value, with ancient woodland, hedgerows, meadows and ponds.

Turn right and follow this track to a junction where you bear left. At the next junction bear right and continue following the track all the way to pass a gate beside the Equestrian Centre. Turn left at the junction and follow the track until you reach a gap in the fence on your right to take a short path through to reach the car park. Walk through the car park to the far end and follow the surfaced track past a set of double gates. Turn left and follow the track as it bends round to the right. About halfway along the field edge take the path through the wood to your left. Follow this to cross a lane and continue ahead to a path junction where you turn left out of the Country Park.

Follow the narrow path to emerge by the entrance to West Park Hospital. Turn to the right past the hospital entrance and continue past a row of cottages along a bridleway to reach Christchurch Road. Cross over and follow the surfaced horseride to the right.

10. This is Epsom Common, bought by Epsom and Ewell Borough Council in the 1930's after the demise of the Manor of Epsom. Grazed until World War 2, when the common was partly ploughed, it now has large areas of developing woodland. Its management aims to maintain large open areas to conserve the diverse flora that gave it Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) status.

Take the first path to the left, which continues straight on through woodland and then onto a wide grassy ride, ignoring all side paths, until after about 700 yards you reach a wide grassy crossroads. Turn right and follow this to join the surfaced horseride straight ahead. Follow this as it winds through the scrub, ignoring the path to the right, to take the first path to the left. Follow this past a sign for Ashtead Common and turn left on to a surfaced track. You have now completed 9 miles of the Link.

11. Ashtead Common is steeped in history. There are 2000 old oak pollards on the Common, remnants of a past management technique known as pasture woodland. The branches were cut on a rotational basis above the browse line. This dual system involves cutting the trees on a regular basis at head height to obtain a timber crop and the grazing of livestock beneath. Owned by the Corporation of London, Ashtead Common is a National Nature Reserve because of its ancient pollards and the rare wildlife associated with them.

Follow this track to cross The Rye and continue ahead over the level crossing. Take the main path through the woods parallel to the backs of the houses to emerge on Craddocks Avenue. Cross over and follow Forest Crescent through to Epsom Road. Cross Epsom Road carefully using the traffic island. Turn right, cross Farm Lane and continue a short distance along Epsom Road to go through a set of decorative, white iron gates on your left into Ashtead Park.

12. The first part of Ashtead Park that you walk through, is now a public open space owned by Mole Valley District Council. The scrub and young woodland has gradually developed, but at one time this was a deer park. There are two large ponds which support a wide range of species. Some large, ancient oak trees still remain and in summer the grassland is ablaze with colour from the many wildflowers and butterflies. The rest of the park forms the grounds to the City of London Freemans' School, centred on the Manor House of 1790.

Follow the track all the way across the Park to reach a road. Turn right along the road to reach another set of white gates. Go through these and turn left up Park Lane, using the path on the right hand side of the road. At Chalk Lane turn right and follow this to meet Grays

Lane. Continue ahead down a narrow bridleway to meet Crampshaw Lane. Cross over and turn left to follow the path that runs through the trees alongside the road. Follow this bridleway beyond the houses as it gradually rises up the hill out of Ashtead. Carry straight on at the first crossroads. At the second, turn right onto Stane Street.

13. *Stane Street is an old Roman Road, dating back to the occupation of Britain over 1900 years ago. It was constructed to link London with Chichester, which was an important town in Roman times. The name, however, dates from later Saxon times and means stone road. Part of it is now a Scheduled Ancient Monument.*

The Thames Down Link follows this straight Roman Road nearly all the rest of the way, with lovely views across the countryside to the west. Follow Stane Street straight on, ignoring all side paths, to pass over the M25 and cross over Headley Road, The Drive (leading to Tyrells Wood Golf Club) and Mill Way until the track bends around to the left. Take care crossing these roads. At this point the track becomes known as Downs Road. Follow the main track around the bend to the right and continue along another straight stretch, ignoring all side paths, to go gradually downhill to meet Headley Lane.

14. *Juniper Hall is now a Field Studies Council centre, where environmental courses are held. This was once the site of the Royal Oak Inn, which was extended in 1762 by Sir Cecil Bishopp, who also planted the nine cedars in the grounds. French aristocrats sheltered here during the French Revolution. The Inn part of the building was demolished in 1870 and the current building has been much modified over the years.*

Turn right and cross over London Road to take the path below the road to the left. Where this ends continue along the pavement to the junction with the Zigzag.

15. *The slope up from here leads to Box Hill, which is owned by the National Trust. Box Hill is a famous viewpoint, which was made popular with the arrival of the railway line at Westhumble. The hill rises approximately 600 feet above sea level and offers terrific views across Surrey and the Weald. It is an SSSI because of its rich chalk downland flora and rare box tree woodland. In the summer the hillside is full of flowers, including several orchid species.*

Cross over and take the path to the right that runs parallel to London Road. Follow this to reach a gap in the fence leading back on to the road. Turn left along the pavement past the Burford Bridge Hotel. Continue along the pavement parallel to the main road, crossing over the River Mole to reach a subway.

16 *The River Mole rises in Rusper in Sussex and flows 50 miles northwards to the Thames, near Hampton Court. Legend has it that it is called the 'Mole' because it disappears underground into the chalk near Dorking during dry weather.*

At this point you can go through the subway to reach Boxhill and Westhumble Railway Station to return to wherever you started your walk. Otherwise, you can follow the North Downs Way National Trail to the west, or continue along the pavement to follow the North Downs Way National Trail to the east.

17. *The North Downs Way National Trail is a 153 mile route which runs from Farnham in the west to the coast at Dover. It follows the crest of the North Downs through countryside of outstanding natural beauty.*

How To Get There

By Rail: The start of the walk in Kingston is about 1/2 mile from Kingston Station; take Fife road opposite the station, at the end turn right to reach Kingston Bridge. The walk can also be reached from Berrylands Station, which is passed on the route. From Malden Manor Station turn left down Sheephouse Way; from Ashted Station, take Woodfield Lane and turn left along Craddocks Avenue until you pick up the Link just before the A24. Boxhill and Westhumble Station is at the southern end of the route.

At Kingston Station trains run every 15 mins Mon - Sat and every 30 mins on Sun to Waterloo.

At Boxhill & Westhumble Station trains run hourly Mon - Sat and every 30 mins on Sun to Victoria. For more information phone National Rail Enquiries on 0345 484950.

By Bus: The route is served by numerous bus routes. The 465 runs from Kingston Bus Station to Burford Bridge every 90 mins (120 mins at weekends). For more details contact Surrey Travel Line on 01737 223000. At the A3 the 265 links Tolworth and Putney, at the A240 the 406 links Kingston and Epsom and at the A24 the 479 links Kingston and Leatherhead. 24 hour Bus Travel Information 020 7222 1234.

By Car: There are plenty of car parks in Kingston town centre. Parking is also available at Horton Country Park, Stew Ponds car park on Epsom Common, and at Burford Bridge car park at the southern end of the route.

The Thames Down Link was initiated by the Lower Mole Project to encourage local people to explore the countryside on their doorstep. All the paths used along the walk have been waymarked by the Project, however you may wish to use this leaflet in conjunction with an Ordnance Survey map (Landranger 1:50 000 176 & 187, or Explorer 1:25 000 146 & 161).

The majority of the walk is suitable for pushchairs and the less mobile, except for the stretch between Stane Street and Burford Bridge which is fairly steep.

If you would like more information about:

Local Nature Reserves, contact Royal Borough of Kingston on 020 8546 2121.

Tolworth Court Farm, contact Lower Mole Project on 01372 743783.

Horton Country Park & Epsom Common, contact the Epsom and Ewell Rangers on 01372 741191.

Ashted Common, contact the Corporation of London on 01372 279083.

Ashted Park, contact Mole Valley District Council on 01306 885001.

Box Hill and Mickleham Downs, contact the National Trust on 01306 885502.

If you encounter any problems or would like further information please contact:

The Lower Mole Countryside Management Project, 2 West Park Farmhouse, Horton Country Park, Horton Lane, Epsom, Surrey, KT19 8PL.

Tel. 01372 743783 Fax. 01372 742291 Email: mole.project@surreycc.gov.uk