

Westcott

Distance: 8.74km / 5.4 miles, total ascent 247m / 810 feet, mostly moderate walking

In Pursuit of Spring: Chapter 2 The start: London to Guildford

Refreshments: The Prince of Wales, Guildford Rd RH4 3QE,
The Cricketers, 1 Heath Rise, Westcott RH4 3NN

Map: Explorer 146 (Dorking, Box Hill and Reigate)

Getting there: Bus from Dorking

If driving, park in the Car Park on the edge of Milton Heath on the **A25**, marked by a No Through Road sign on the road's south side and a finger post indicating Milton Heath and the Nower (meaning "at the slope or bank"), the starting direction of the walk. The Nower was a popular walk route for Dorking folk in Thomas's day.

At three, after eating I was on the road again, making for Guildford by way of Wotton, Shere and Shalford... The road was level, impossible to cycle on against the wind. But the eye was not starved; there was no haste. I now had the clear line of the Downs on my right hand, and was to have them so to Shalford. At first, in the region of Denbies, they were thoroughly tamed, their smoothness made park-like, their trees mostly fir. Beyond, their sides, of an almost uniform gentle steepness, but advancing and receding, hollowed and cleft, were adorned by increasingly various combinations of beech wood, of scattered yew and thorn, of bare ploughland or young corn, and of naked chalk. The rolling commons at their feet, Milton Heath and Westcott Heath, were traversed by my road.

Westcott, a chapelry of Dorking in Victorian times, lies between Ranmore on the North Downs and Leith Hill on the Greensand Ridge. Along with Milton, it was noted in Domesday as distinct from Dorking. Neither developed into flourishing centres. When Thomas cycled through the population was just over a thousand. It is now a thriving residential area. The Pipp Brook runs through the village centre towards Dorking. It was believed to have medicinal qualities but hopes of a spa future came to little. Wool and meat from the sheep farming on the North Downs were marketed in the nearby town.

Pre-1800 buildings can be seen north of the main road, along Balchins Lane which included the Tudor-built home of actor Leslie Howard (1893–1943). The knapped-flint and ashlar Holy Trinity Church was designed and built in the 1850s by Sir George Gilbert Scott.

In Pursuit of Spring reads, *Milton Heath, except for some rugged, heathery, pine-crested mounds on the right, was rather unnoticeable in comparison with Buryhill, a roof-like distinct, even ridge, and steep slopes of grass. Its trees are chiefly upon the top, embowering a classic, open summer-house.*



From Westcott to the Downs, BM

1. Follow the road in a south-westerly direction away from the A25. (An alternative car park (154:488) is 100 yards on the left). Keep following road as it swings to the right through mixed woodland.



Path through the Nower

2. When the road veers left, near a lodge, keep ahead along footpath. Continue past 'Evening Stables', and along a narrow-fenced path that leads downhill.

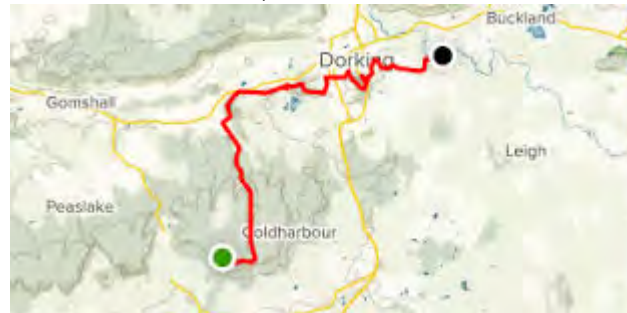
3. When a lane is reached, go left and then right (after 75 yards) over a foot bridge and continue along the Greensand Way.

4. Eventually the path drops down to a metal kissing gate and leads to a residential area. Continue past the houses and pick up the Greensand Way again; follow it uphill to a lane. Go left along lane and across Wescott Heath.

The walk's course is on the Lower Greensand which lies between the chalk North Downs on the right and the Wealden clay to the left. Indeed, it follows a section of the Greensand Way which goes through mixed woods of sweet chestnut, beech, holly sycamore, silver birch, hazel and alder.



Westcott and Milton St, c 1908



The Greensand Way

The Greensand Way runs across Surrey to Romney Marsh in Kent. The Way takes its name from the layers of the green mineral glauconite in the sandstone. A Greensand ridge runs broadly parallel to and south of the North Downs ridge as well as of Edward Thomas's *In Pursuit of Spring* road. The presence of fences along this stretch is regrettable to the walker, whose attention can be led to the trees above. Continue along narrow fenced path that rises steadily uphill.

5. When lane swings to the right, keep ahead into woodland and follow the obvious path downhill until you reach Rookery Drive, and the A25, Edward Thomas's actual route.



Drawing of Wotton Hall by John Evelyn



Wotton Church

6. Cross the A25 and go left along road for 100 metres, and then right into Balchin's Lane.

7. As the lane turns to the right at Sunny Mount, cross stile and take the northward footpath through trees to Dean Farm

8. Cross a footbridge and stile, pass the farm on the right and continue across the open field to the left of the trees.

10. Go over another footbridge and at T-junction, go left along track that leads to a railway crossing. Cross the railway.

Thomas:

After Milton Street came Westcott Heath and a low shingled spire up amid the gorse. The road was now cutting through sand, and the sand walls were half overgrown with moss and gorse, ivy and celandine, and overhung with wild cherry and beech. Behind me, as I climbed, a moment's sunlight brought out the white scar of Box Hill...

Between the rising road and the Downs lay a hollow land, for nearly two miles occupied in its lowest part by the oaks of a narrow wood, called Deerleap Wood, running parallel to the road: sometimes the grey trunks were washed faintly with light, the accumulated branch-work proved itself purplish, and here and there the snick of a lost bough was bright. Over the summit of the wood I could see the chalky ploughland or pasture of the Downs, and their beechen ridge. The hollow land has a kind of island, steep and naturally moated, within it, and close to the road. Here stands Wotton Church, the home of dead Evelyn of Wotton, alone among tall beeches and chestnuts

John Evelyn (1620 – 1706) was born at Wotton Hall. Much admired by Edward Thomas, he was an informative diarist, author of many books, ranging from numismatics to vegetarianism. The family estate was inherited by his brother and though sympathetic to the Royalist cause, he stood back from the Civil War so as not to endanger the property. After the Restoration he was a Crown Commissioner on enquiries such as those involving London street improvement, the repair of post-Fire St Paul's and the care of sick and wounded mariners and prisoners of war. He was a lifelong member of the Royal Society and wrote *Sylva*, a classic on the cultivation and use of trees. He inherited the estate on his brother's death in 1699. In 1913 it contained Evelyn's picture gallery and a prayer book that Charles I had taken on to the scaffold. Both Evelyn and his wife were buried at St John's Church, Wotton. Their sarcophagi were vandalised in 1992 and their skulls were stolen and remain unbound

At this point, Deerleap Wood is off to the left.

Note the iron stone studding in the mortar between the stones of the 16th century Churchgate House on the left. Referring to a similar feature at the Thomas family home of Berryfield in Steep, Helen commented: *It was a*

11. At the next footpath junction, bear half right (not directly right) along a rising path.

12. When path forks, branch left uphill to follow a banked path through yews and beech for a steep quarter of a mile.

13. Go right along the North Downs Way.

14. Cross Steer's Field, just before the entrance to Ranmore Common



Steer's Field



Looking south from Ranmore Common

15. Go right along Ranmore Common Road at the trig point.

saying that the flint and brick houses were held together by tenpenny nails, because of the likeness of these little round stones to the heads of large nails.

The *gentle steepness* of the Downs lies ahead *adorned by increasingly various combinations of beech wood, of scattered yew and thorn.*



Leith Hill from the North Downs

The railway marks the junction between the Lower Chalk and Upper Greensand.

The Downs offers a fine southerly view of the distant Leith Hill which can be viewed from an adjacent seat. At 996 feet/ 303 m, this is the highest elevation in the South East. Follow the path through the trees for another quarter of a mile; it is a fine walk in any weather.

Again, the panoramic view is revealed. In his fieldwork book of May 1908 (No. 17 in the Berg Library), Thomas makes notes as he walks this section of Pilgrims' Way from east to west: *Deep ancient r(oa)d dipping fr(om) Ranmore am(on)g beeches also yew, beam + wild cherry flowing + clematis past an old grassy chalk pit over Pilgrims' with Dorking beautiful smooth park w(ith) dark trees above Pilgrims in Dorking the rain comes heavy + dark on bright trees that pant + wave with joy + before you have done watching the drip + glitter + waves the sky overhead is deep blue with round-edged white clouds Ranmore Common ash oak holly + thorn + decent grass edge (w(ith) sometimes gorse) between trees + road* [his punctuation, contractions and underlinings].

In an April 1914 letter to his friend John Freeman who was following the Pilgrims' way westward he wrote: *I am sending you 2 maps that will take you from Dorking to Salisbury Plain or the New Forest. I haven't got all the inch maps for the Pilgrim's Way. Besides which they are not yet*

16. After 500 metres, a flint wall runs along the left side of the road and a bridleway finger post will be seen on the right. Follow this downward path, which lies at an acute angle to the road.

17. Cross a broad path – the Pilgrims’ trackway – and continue downhill and cross the railway.

18. At the next junction, keep following the main track, which veers off to the left.

19. When Miltoncourt Farm and a large lake are reached, bear right at T-junction along Miltoncourt Lane and follow it to the A25 Westcott Road.

20. Cross over to the finger post and follow the path leftwards to the lane and the car parks.

revised according to Belloc’s route. I believe these 2 are enough. You will do well to go up Ranmore Common from Dorking and descend upon the Pilgrim’s Way somewhere about White Downs, and from there by St. Martha’s Chapel and into Guildford opposite the ruin of St Catherine’s Chapel; it is pretty easy to follow...



St Martha’s Chapel, Pilgrims’ Way

Pits on the Common mined flints to face local walls and houses. Carefully walk along road on the right-hand side facing the oncoming traffic.

In the 1908 workbook, Thomas adds: *looking S + S.E. fr(om) height above Pilgrims nr Dorking the decent vale near is square green fields + parkland slopes + dark trees to pale trees + long Dorking town but a little further then trees + England seems a dense greenwood for 15 miles to the S.E. ridge*



Miltoncourt Lodge



Miltoncourt Pond

With special thanks to Mike Cope, Sam Townsend and Jane M

