

Chaldon Walks

Chaldon residents walked each of its footpaths regularly twice a year from the 1920s until a few years ago. There are seven walks of varying lengths designed to cover the network of official paths and bridleways within the parish. This is an attempt to preserve that tradition and provide some interesting detail. Put together by Liz Bonsall with contributions from Adele Brand, Madeline Hutchins and Lizzy Maskey. May 2020. Revised April 2026.

Chaldon Walk 5 – (route adopted 2013) Chaldon X Roads, Tollsworth Manor, North Downs Way, Park Ham, Spring Bottom, Quarry Hangers, North Downs Way, Hilltop Farm, Fiveways, Willey Broom Wood, Village Hall. 3.6 miles, approximately 1.75 hours.



Map created by Martin Lubikowski, ML Designs, Chaldon

Liz Bonsall July 2020, revised April 2026

Start by the post box at the crossroads of Hilltop Lane/Church Lane with the B2031 (Rook Lane). At the crossroads there are two bungalows. The left hand one replaces a building that was at various times a post office (the other PO was in The Heath), general stores, an off licence (1980), dentist (1981). Until 2011 there was a telephone kiosk alongside the post box. Opposite is a bus shelter, originally wood (1957) later replaced with steel and glass, but after objections from the Chaldon Association a new wooden one was put in its place.

Cross Hilltop Lane to the short signpost pointing to a gap in the hedge. On your left was an air raid shelter used during WW2. Access to this was still visible until about twelve years ago when the hole was filled in. **Going through the gap, pass to the side of the old stile into the field keeping to the path on your left** (you are now on FP12 entering a working farm). Skylarks nest on this farm so please keep both people and dogs on the paths. **At the end of the garden hedge on your left the path crosses the open field to the next hedge** usually through crops. As you approach the next hedge pause to look left to the back gardens of houses in Hilltop Lane, ahead to see Uplands Farm and to your right Alderstead and Furzefield Woods, Chaldon Court Farm buildings and even the hills to the north of London on a clear day. To your left and towards the back gardens there was once a field pond (shown on OS maps until 1912).

Enter the gap in the hedge noticing the old stile to your left. At one time pigs were kept in this area and the path was constantly muddy with pig swill. Passing through along a concrete path, built to avoid pig swill, you enter another field. Ahead are Tollsworth farm buildings. You can often hear and see skylarks in this field. Mayweed, which looks like a giant daisy, is often in flower around the path in the summer. The height of the crop determines what you can see at different times of the year but it is possible, from right to left, to see Tollsworth Cottages, Tollsworth Manor, farm cottages and the farmyard and farm buildings. **At the end of the field, by a garden fence, you will emerge onto a track. Keep left and follow the chalk track.**

At the next fork continue south on the main track, keeping the hedge to your right (a fingerpost and an old green metal sign point the way to Shepherds Hill). Ancient earthworks exist behind the dense hedge as well as another of Chaldon's ponds (no visible signs exist). You will glimpse a signpost ahead on the brow of the hill. When you reach the top of the hill admire the spectacular views north, including the London skyline, and south across the Weald towards the South Downs. This is a good place to look for buzzards (which have fan-shaped tails) and red kites (which are clearly forked). You can also see and hear the major motorway network of M23 and M25. **Follow the bridleway to your left.**

Keep left, between hedges and you are joining the North Downs Way (marked with a fingerpost in the hedge). This is an ancient trackway and still walked today by pilgrims from Winchester to Canterbury. Gaps in the hedge to your left give more views of London, including showing Wembley arch to the West. After about 100 metres, on your right, you may spot a storm damaged trunk of an oak tree, and just after this, notice the white undersides of the leaves of a whitebeam.

You will reach a wide gap in the hedge on your right. Walk to the concrete trig point (see the Ordnance Survey website for a fascinating history of trig points / trig pillars). Notice the two magnificent ash trees and stunning views across the Weald towards the South Downs, and to the West along the Surrey Hills. You are standing above the network of stone mines existing below Chaldon that provided stone for such famous buildings as Westminster Abbey, London Bridge and Windsor Castle, as well as for local buildings. Access to the mines was at ground level at the bottom of the escarpment, with tunnels gently sloping down following the seam of stone. The blocks of stone were brought out on sledges pulled by oxen.

On the other side of the track almost opposite the gap was once Hilltop Cottage, clearly shown on OS maps until 1872 and with a footpath going diagonally towards Tollsworth Manor Farm. The footpath is shown on OS maps until 1946 although it wasn't officially extinguished until 1994. No sign remains of the cottage, its garden or pond.

On the next section of the track, you can see raised banks on each side and the hedgerows are very old. It has been estimated (by counting the number of species present) that the hedge on your right is possibly 700 years old and on your left 500 years old. In springtime these hedgerows are filled with a huge variety of flowers.

At the end of the track you come to the Chaldon Village sign (installed 2003) at the brow of Hilltop Lane. Concrete slabs have been placed here to prevent vehicular access on the bridleway.

Cross Hilltop Lane carefully and take the track ahead and slightly to your right. After a few metres notice the old sign for Pilgrims Way. To your left was the old Hilltop Farm with the new Hilltop Farm ahead of you up the driveway to your left and Summercourt to your right. You are still on the North Downs Way heading east. Gaps in the tree cover and hedges allow glimpses of the Weald.

Houses you may notice are The Allt (Welsh for wooded slope or hillside) on your right, The Beacon to your left and then Rest Harrow on the right. Restharrow is a low growing creeping plant with small pink flowers, found on chalk grasslands. "Common restharrow has extremely tough, thick roots that spread in a dense network and, during the days of horse-drawn cultivation, could stop ('arrest') a harrow in its tracks." www.wildlifetrusts.org

A gate on the right offers the first proper view out over chalk grassland where you may see Downlands Trust sheep. On your left, after a set of tall wooden gates there is a wonderful oak tree intertwined with a sycamore. You then reach Hilltop House and The Stables. The house had a tower in the left hand front corner in the 19th century with a viewing platform at the top. Hilltop House was once the home of the Granville White family (the family planted daffodils on Church Green in memory of Brian Granville White, killed in WW2 and commemorated on the stained glass window in Chaldon Church). To your right are the slopes of Park Ham, part of the Quarry Hangers Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). This has been protected since 1955. (Quarry Hangers is a reference to the stone quarries that were worked in the hillside).

Continue along the wooded track, look to the left and after a short distance in the woods you will see a very deep wooded quarry, once a chalk/lime pit, designed as an Italian garden and during the Second World War used as shelter for Canadian Troops. An application to infill this pit was refused in 1991. At the end of the quarry is a fork in the track with the left fork leading to a gated area for two radio masts.

Opposite, on the right is the entrance to Park Ham.

Park Ham is part of the SSSI, owned by Surrey County Council and managed by the Downlands Partnership, and designated as important for nature conservation by Natural England. Please keep your dog/s under control and take great care to close all gates behind you. At various times you can see sheep, cattle and goats.

Enter the first field and follow the track diagonally to the right towards a hedge. Note the many anthills. These are an indicator of old, 'unimproved' grassland (that is, grassland that hasn't been affected by modern agriculture – a rarity now in the UK). You may see clusters of crosswort, a small, pale green plant from the coffee family that smells of honey. **Pass through the gate** and into the next open area where you will find a beautiful sculptured oak bench. Commissioned by the Old Surrey Downs Project it was created by Surrey based sculptor Ruth Wheeler and depicts snails found on chalk grassland sites (Roman and the rare introduced *Trochoidea elegans*). The largest snail in the UK, many Roman snails can be seen in this area, especially after rain. They are a protected species (it is illegal to kill or even touch them) so be careful underfoot!

The seat is at the head of a steepcombe on the chalk scarp and from here you can look across the Weald towards the South Downs. The steep bowl like feature in front of you (Park Ham Bowl) was formed by frost action and meltwater during the last Ice Age, around 12,000 years ago. The glacier only came as far south as Finchley, but the ground water under here was frozen, and when it melted forced its way out of the hillside forming the bowl you see. In the 1990s this site was put up for development as a ski slope but vigorously opposed by many organisations, not least the people of Chaldon. Sitting here you may see buzzards, red kite and skylarks. Listen for the trilling songs of linnets and whitethroats in the hedges. Nearby, in spring and summer, there are large patches of wild marjoram. Rubbing a leaf and smelling will confirm that you have the right plant. There is also bird's foot trefoil. Its yellow flowers and red buds give it the name of Eggs and Bacon.

From the seat take the path to your right and follow it around the edge of the bowl. Bear left and continue downhill admiring the outstanding views across the Surrey Weald and depending on the season, the wildflowers and butterflies. Violets, orchids and the tiny bright flowers of milkwort may be seen. The landscape you see now is the result of cutting back of invasive plants and periodic grazing by sheep, goats and cattle. You are now in the parish of Bletchingley although the ancient parish of Chaldon extended down to the bottom of the hill and over the road until 1933. When you reach the bottom lip of the bowl there is an area with wildflowers that is usually sheltered and great for observing butterflies. **Walk through the kissing gate at the side of the water trough and into a meadow**, festooned with flowers in spring and summer. This is a lowland meadow, a very different grassland community from the chalk downland that grows on the slopes. Both habitats are

critically endangered in the UK (over 90% declines in the 20th century) so Quarry Hangers is very important for their conservation. Common spotted orchids, greater yellow-rattle and crocuses can all be found.

Bear left crossing the field diagonally and through another kissing gate (with an information board nearby). You are now on a bridleway leading uphill from Spring Bottom Lane to the North Downs Way. **Cross the bridleway, passing through another gate.**

Follow the path keeping parallel with the lane on your right. You are now in an area known as Ash Plisher. Although this path is not technically within the SSSI it also supports lowland meadow and is very rich in wildflowers and butterflies. After a short distance, once the barbed wire fence starts by the hedge on your right, behind it you can see more of the Victorian iron estate fencing installed in 1875 to enclose what were once open grassy slopes. The fencing continues all along this boundary. Further along, up the slope on your left, you will see stumps from recent clearing of scrub. The path at this point has numerous orchids beside it including the common spotted orchid, and also plantain and lady's bedstraw. You may also notice that the ash trees in the hedge here are suffering from ash dieback. **Go through the next gate, with clematis beside it, into a dark wooded area.** Some tree trunks have large clematis plants winding around them, and the ground is carpeted with dog's mercury, an indicator plant for ancient woodland (also poisonous to dogs).

Soon you reach a wide track. Turn left, walk uphill and, passing by steps on your left, **take the right hand track** (*another option is to take the left turn through a gate, to climb very steep wooden steps almost vertically up the scarp. You will have stunning views as you go and join the path east/west where you will turn left and pick up the description at * below. You could turn right to see the Seat for Geoff, and pick up at ** below, in which case you need to return the way you came as you leave the seat.*)

Continuing on the track you will have a steady climb uphill along what is known as The Hanger. You will soon see that you are following a path cutting across a very steep hill. When you emerge from the wooded area, you can see Spring Bottom below and there are views across to War Coppice. Look out for more flowers along this path, including the sky-blue heads of small scabious. There is evidence of scrub and tree clearing on the scarp. Beside the path on the right there is shrubby growth of the common wayfaring tree with domed clusters of white flowers that become red fruit ripening to black. Further along, as you enter woods again, you will see three white beams, a yew and some wild cherry trees with horizontal banding on their trunks. After a short distance in the woods, **where a path crosses the track, you turn left through an iron gate.** (*straight ahead will take you to Willey Farm or Stanstead Road, and the path to the right steeply down to Spring Bottom*).

The path leads westwards. As you leave the woods, through a kissing gate into a meadow, in the distance you can see the spire of St John's Church Redhill and the town itself. Take the left fork and continue along the open path with wide sweeping views. On your right is a wooded bank/lynchet which marks the edge of the flatter area of fields preserving the patterns of a Celtic field system. By the path here in summer are wonderful banks of wild thyme. ****** You will soon come across a 'Seat for Geoff'. Geoff Hewlett is a resident of Chaldon and spent many years volunteering

with the Surrey Wildlife Trust and working on the clearance of scrub to provide the landscape we have today. As a result of volunteer work we have a chalk downland rich in species, including marjoram, wild thyme, wild basil and wild strawberry, as well as 22 species of butterfly. Old chalk downland is a very rare habitat – the UK holds half the world's total.

After the seat, the hedge by the path has dogwood and wild privet in it. *At the next kissing gate, a fallen tree is a casualty of high winds in 2020, and you could count the rings on the tree trunk! **Pass through the gate** and then after a short distance pass the farm gate on your right. Here is another good place to look at the panoramic views. From left to right you can see Tilburstow Hill, the square tower of Bletchingley Church, the M23 bridge, Fuller's Earth Quarries, Mercers Lake, Redhill and Reigate Hill. On a clear day you can see to the South Downs.

Follow the track and as you walk slightly downhill approaching the hedge take care not to trip in the rabbit holes that are on and to the side of the path. You will see in 2026 that a new hedge is being planted on your right.

As you **pass through the gate** notice the old Victorian gatepost and the old gate to the right. You have now reached the bridleway from Spring Bottom to North Downs Way. **Turn right and walk uphill**; you are walking on another ancient route from Bletchingley to Chaldon. At various points you can see the steepness of the bank to the right of the path. There is a line of thin conifers on the left and then you catch views over Park Ham Bowl. On the right at this point there are a number of huge old ash trees with their enormous trunks and branches covered in ivy. You will reach the North Downs Way and a three way fingerpost.

Turn left and walk west along North Downs Way, just a short distance to the entrance to Park Ham.

*(An alternate, slightly quicker, route is to turn right and follow the path passing the entrance to Roverdene on your left, followed by beautiful ancient hedgerow then turning left at the fingerpost signed Public Footpath to Rook Lane. Passing under a tree branch and through the remains of a stile the path is bordered on one side by woodland and on the right by fields. On the left look for a gap in the hedge where you will see the campsite for Roverdene where several generations of local people have learnt their camp craft with the Scout/Guide Association. Continuing along the path you will pass a bungalow behind a high fence. On your left is Ridgebushes Wood, an ancient woodland with signs of heavy coppicing. Eventually you will reach Fiveways where you can re-join the route described below from *).*

Retrace your route to Hilltop Farm with its driveway parallel to the North Downs Way. Just past its gate and name board, on the right is what was once the farmyard of the original Hilltop Farm. **Take the right hand path to Hilltop Lane, then turn right into the lane.** On your right is Pilgrims Lodge, once part of the farm. The long barn behind the hedge was the milking barn and the farm supplied Chaldon with its milk until the 1950s. **When you reach the entrance to Pilgrims Lodge turn right** keeping to the left of the private drive.

If you have a dog with you please put it on a lead.

Climb the stile and walk through the concreted yard keeping to your left until you come to a second stile. There are five stiles along FP13 between Hilltop Lane and Birchwood Lane. Take care at the third stile which has barbed wire on the post. At the corner of the barbed wire fence to the left, after the third stile, look to the right and just in front of you can be seen a raised bank leading to the woodland. This is thought to be part of a Celtic field system. The path you are on is shown on maps over a long period including the Tithe Map of 1837. The fields to your left are known as Purley Field and Hilltop, to your right The Eleven Acres and ahead is Broom Field. Originally arable, pasture and mangold (or mangel-wurzel, a root vegetable related to beets, grown primarily for animal fodder), these fields are now increasingly used for horse grazing. In 1953 a grand housing development plan for 151 properties on these fields did not succeed.

Follow the path always heading for the next stile. Ahead you have Ridgebushes Wood to your right and Willey Broom Wood to your left. Both are ancient woodland and with the fields provide an important wildlife corridor that runs from Happy Valley in the north through to the North Downs in the south. On the edge of the wood to your right is one of Chaldon's ancient ponds, not accessible to the public, nor visible from the path.

After the fifth stile, in front of you is a signpost known as Fiveways, a great local landmark and major hub of the Chaldon footpath network. As you approach Fiveways you will see Birchwood Lane ahead of you with a line of silver birches which may have given the road its name. It is possible to see buzzards, bullfinches and woodpeckers in this area.

****From Fiveways follow the sign to Willey Broom Lane ¼ mile.***

Walking through Willey Broom Wood, an ancient woodland, notice several large uprooted trees, casualties of the 1987 Great Storm. The wood is heavily carpeted with bluebells in spring. After a short distance, the path passes between two posts signed with a yellow footpath arrow. This takes you onto a fenced and very narrow path. When you emerge into the open onto Willey Broom Lane look left where you will see the gate to Six Brothers Field, the smallest property of the National Trust. *If you take a diversion into Six Brothers Field you will see the Scout Hut and Cricket Pavilion as well as a restored meadow and field margins managed for wildlife. An Information Board tells the story of Martin Coles Harman who gave the site to the people of Chaldon who use it for various community events throughout the year.*

Turn right along Willey Broom Lane, and the first bungalow is called Puffin. Puffins live on Lundy Island which was the home of Martin Coles Harman from the late 1920s. He declared himself King of Lundy issuing his own puffin coins and stamps. He was responsible for making Willey Broom Lane a public footpath for the use of children walking from other parts of Chaldon or Caterham to school at the end of the lane. Follow Willey Broom Lane and towards the end of the private road, on the right, you will see the backs of the Old Schoolhouse, Goswell Cottage, the Village Hall and glimpses of St Peter & St Paul's Primary School.

At Rook Lane (B2031), for the purposes of the historic walk, you turn right towards the Village Hall and its car park. If you follow this direction you will pass the front of the Old Schoolhouse and notice the school bell mounted on the wall. The building was a school until 1965. The next house is Goswell Cottage, one of a few dwellings along this road until after WW1. You then reach Chaldon Village Hall, on the site which was given by Martin Coles Harman. The Hall was built as a Peace Memorial after WW1 by public subscription, part destroyed in WW2 and rebuilt with the generosity of the people of Chaldon. The car park was added in 1932.

Walk up the slope to the Hall entrance and read the inscription on the Legrew Memorial stone.

End of Walk 5.

To learn more about the history of Chaldon visit www.chaldonhistory.org.uk