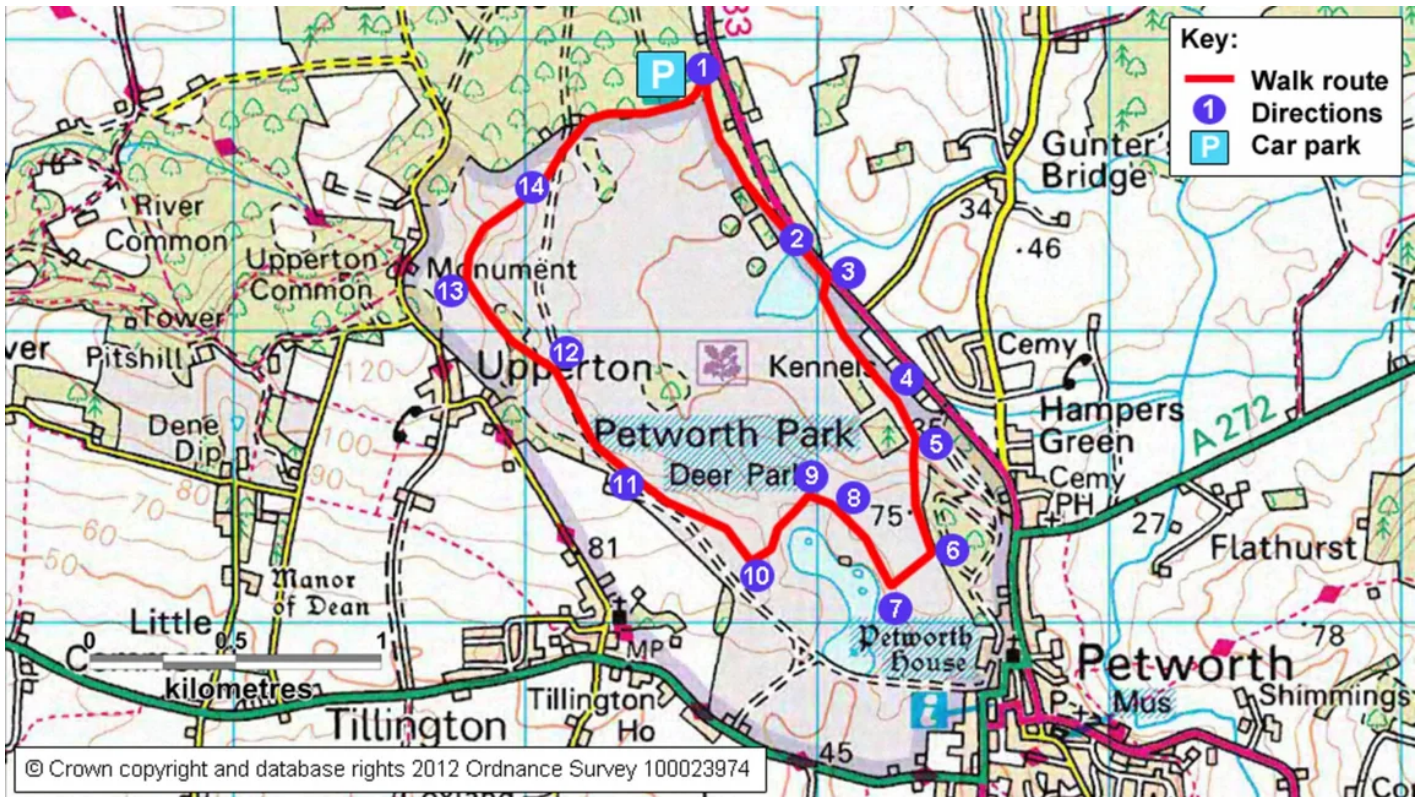


SUSSEX

Petworth ancient trees walk

Petworth Park is home to some of the country's oldest and most vulnerable beeches, limes and oaks, including one that dates back to the Norman Conquest. Discover more about the ancient trees that dominate the skyline of Petworth on this circular walk.



Information

Address: Petworth North car park, London Rd (A283), West Sussex, GU28 9LS

OS map: Landranger 197; Explorer 133

Activity: Walking

Moderate: Hilly route with some steep inclines. For further information, please see Terrain section.

Dog friendly: Dogs are welcome but must be kept under close control, as deer graze in the park.

Full trail: Miles: 4 (km: 6.4)

Access: Challenging

Duration: 1 hour 30 mins

Terrain

Terrain is steep in places and can be muddy underfoot.

Total steps: 14

Start point: Petworth Park car park, grid ref: SU966238 (not Petworth House car park)

1. From the ticket machine in the car park and with the Petworth Park wall on your left, walk down the grass path (keeping the wall to your left). Of note are the mature specimens of English oak (*Quercus robur*), beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) and aspen (*Populus tremula*) in the woodland surrounding the car park. As you reach the open parkland, note the trees bordering the park wall, laid out by 'Capability' Brown to make the parkland seem more expansive. Continue until you find a stone square in the centre of the path, turn left and walk towards the wall. Here you will find an English oak with a plaque declaring it to be the Beelzebub Oak.
2. Continue towards the Lower Pond. On the right-hand side you will see a large English oak which is around 360 years old. As you approach the pond you will pass a stand of mature red oaks (*Quercus rubra*). These have large lobed leaves which turn yellowish brown in autumn. Next to the pond shore you will see one of the park's many old sweet chestnuts (*Castanea sativa*); this one is approximately 350 years old.
3. As you walk along the pond dam you will see a dead tree on the left. Continue down the slope at the end of the pond dam, keeping the park wall on your left.
4. Pass the hound kennels (Leconfield Estate) and then the house on the left-hand side. To the right you can see the two clumps of trees which were planted between 1968 and 1972 to hide the planned Petworth Northern Bypass (which was never built). Walk away from the wall at this point, heading diagonally right on a grassy track up the hill.
5. When you meet the gravel track, turn right onto it and continue to walk uphill. You will soon reach the wall that encloses the Pleasure Garden. At this point on the crest of the hill there is a very old and gnarled sweet chestnut, some 500 years old – a young tree in Tudor Britain.
6. Continue along the path until, on the right, you come across possibly the oldest tree in the park, one of three very old English oaks. This ancient tree is estimated to be some 940 years old, so a sapling around the time of the Norman invasion. Keep on until

Petworth House comes into view, then turn right off the track, across the hill (called Lawn Hill) to a fallen sweet chestnut which was a casualty of the 1987 storm. A ring count revealed it was 285 years old.

7. Cross Lawn Hill to find the view over the Upper Pond. As you walk through the ancient oaks and chestnuts note how many have holed trunks that provide nesting for jackdaws, spotted flycatchers, stock doves and starlings.
8. With the lake on your left, follow the grass path until you come to the saddle between Lawn Hill and another hill known as Arbour Hill. In front of you are some very old sweet chestnuts aged between 300 and 600 years old. Their gnarled forms make a magnificent sight and some of the trees bear witness to lightning strikes. Go down the hill to the copse around the Upper Pond, which is surrounded by metal railings.
9. Turn right and follow the railings around the head of the pond. Turn right up the slope between two trees as you approach a metal gate into the copse near the railings' end. Within the copse you can see mature swamp cypress (*Taxodium distichum*) – the species was introduced from North America in 1638.
10. As you climb the hill turn right at a cross path onto another grass path which leads diagonally up the hill away from the Upper Pond. You will shortly come to a very old hollow common lime (*Tilia x europaea*).
11. Keep walking on this path up to another hill known as Snow Hill, and at the stone track turn right. Opposite is an ancient London plane tree (*Platanus acerifolia*) with a girth of 5.7m, approximately 270 years old. Alongside the track to your left are some fine examples of small-leaved lime (*Tilia cordata*). As you walk to the right along the track you pass some ancient sweet chestnuts on the top of the hill. Behind these trees to your left is the area formerly occupied by Snow Hill Farm. If you walk the short distance to where the house stood you can see one of the few common walnuts (*Juglans regia*) at Petworth. This tree would have been planted on the house courtyard boundary.
12. Follow the stone track down the hill with a fenced enclosure on your left. Because deer have been excluded from this area, it has scrubby undergrowth which provides good bird nesting habitats. On your right you pass an old scarlet oak (*Quercus coccinea*); this tree lost a major limb in 2015 during high winds, and has glossy green, deeply lobed large leaves that turn a brilliant scarlet in autumn. At the end of the enclosure walk up the hill to two huge sweet chestnuts; these are 500 to 600 years old. Return to the track and continue down the slope. Immediately on your right is another of the park's three ancient English oaks. This tree has a lot of epicormic growths on the trunk, making the girth difficult to measure, but it is probably around 850 years old. To avoid the climb up the hill known as Monument Hill (step 13) you can take a shorter, reasonably level route back to the car park. After passing between the two mature sweet chestnuts on the main track, take the diagonal grass path on the right and continue on this, ignoring cross paths to the foot of Half Moon Piece, and walk up the hill to the car park.
13. Shortly after the track reaches the bottom of the hill and after a small grass path joins on the left from the village of Upperton, there is a broad path rising diagonally up the hill to your left. Follow this path, which leads up to Monument Hill where you pass some ancient common beeches (*Fagus sylvatica*) on the edge of the hill, just before the start of the grass path around the concave.
14. Continue around the path, enjoying magnificent views across the Weald. Turn right on the broad grass path that goes down Monument Hill. As you descend look to the right-hand side for the ancient sweet chestnut, some 500 years old and with one of its limbs fallen arched to the ground. Where you meet the stone track at the bottom of the hill is a fine example of a mature pin oak (*Quercus palustris*). Continue across the track onto another grass track leading down a slope. On your right is another plantation of beech, amongst them an oriental beech (*Fagus orientalis*) from the Caucasus, Asia Minor and Crimea. It is very similar to the common beech but has longer, darker leaves. As you climb the opposite slope up Half Moon Piece, hidden amongst the trees on your left are several mature specimens of southern beech and aspen (*Populus tremula*). Continue across the top of the hill back to the car park.

End point: Petworth Park car park, grid ref: SU966238 (not Petworth House car park)
