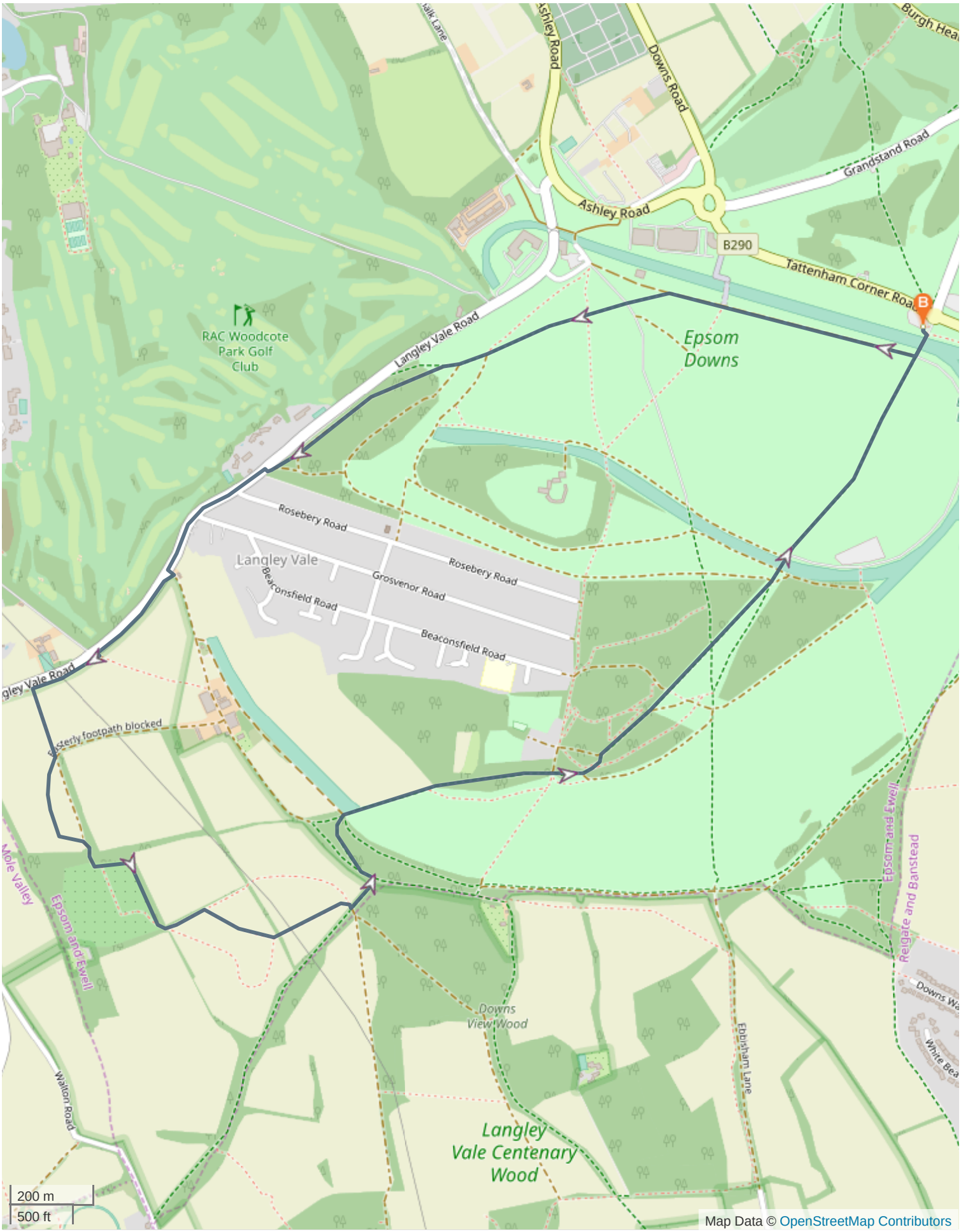
Epsom Downs & Langley Vale Centenary Wood



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Epsom Downs & Langley Vale Centenary Wood - 6.0km

Start to Langley Vale Road

With the Hut car park at Epsom Downs (KT18 5PP) behind you, walk into the racecourse using the path on the left. After heading downhill slightly for less than 50 metres, turn right through the 5 tall wooden posts, joining a gravel track that heads towards the main grandstand. Epsom Downs (named in part after the North Downs) is one of the most popular horse racing venues in England. While the first recorded race took place in 1661, some sources indicate that racing could have actually started much earlier. In 1779, the 12th Earl of Derby, Edward Smith-Stanley, organised an event for him and his friends to race their 3 year old fillies (a female horse too young to be called a mare). This event became so successful that the following year a new official race for colts (young male horses) and fillies was created, known as The Derby. While it started out as a shorter race, the course was extended to its current distance in 1784. The Derby remains an extremely popular event and is the main race associated with Epsom Downs. Once you're alongside the grandstand, the path will fork. Bear left, heading very gently uphill. Go straight on at the crossroads to join a sandy track. Ignore two forks off to the left (and one to the right) and stay on this path, walking parallel to the road. Soon after, the path will end and you'll pop out onto Langley Vale Road.

Langley Vale Road to Centenary Wood

Turn left at Langley Vale Road, following the pavement. Cross over two small side roads (Rosebery Road and Grosvenor Road) and you'll soon pass a petrol station on your left. Shortly after the petrol station, you'll see a small outbuilding on your left with a sign for Langley Bottom farm.

Records indicate that Langley Vale was originally a farm with several tenants that eventually became just one farm (Langley Bottom). After the Black Death, the farm settlements gradually started to disappear from the map, indicating the area was significantly affected. At this point, veer off the pavement onto a parallel footpath to the left. There are actually two footpaths here, take the narrower one slightly further away from the road. Continue walking on this path, passing under a small pylon and following a small fence on your left. At the point where the fence ends, turn left. At this point you should see a wooden structure straight ahead. Walk towards it, following a grass path that gradually moves away from the farmland fence. This structure is called 'Witness', made of around 35 pieces of Oak. It is one of many war memorials that make up the Centenary Wood. Designed to commemorate the First World War, the Woodland Trust has developed 4 Centenary Woods, one in each country of the UK. At 642 acres, the Langley Vale wood is the largest of the four. As you approach the structure, you'll be able to bear right slightly to walk through The Regiment of Trees, arguably the most well-known memorial. The sandstone statues commemorate Lord Kitchener's inspection of the troops, where 20,000 volunteer soldiers waited for hours in freezing conditions (some without kit) for his arrival.

Centenary Wood to Cherry Trees

After walking through The Regiment of Trees, head left to re-join the main path you were previously on. Within a few steps you'll be at a crossroads. Go straight on, heading through a gate. Turn left immediately, so that the fence of the community orchard is on your right.

This orchard, developed in conjunction with Sainsbury's, contains recently planted Apple, Pear, Cherry and Plum trees. Continue on the path slightly downhill, turning right to follow the fence of the orchard. After passing it completely, they'll be a gate on your left. Go through the gate and bend immediately right, passing a hedgerow on your left. At this point, turn left and you should be on a subtle path heading downhill towards a wide wooden gate. Just before you reach the gate, turn right, joining the Avenue of Cherry Trees. Again sponsored by Sainsbury's, this memorial pays tribute to the Sainsbury's staff who lost their lives in the war. The cherry trees are currently protected by wooden crates to stop deer nibbling them.

Cherry Trees to Racecourse

Continue on the path as it gently curves left, heading downhill. When the path forks, ignore the grass track on the left and continue on the current track. At the bottom of the field, the path will bend right towards a kissing gate. Go through the gate and turn immediately left onto a muddy path. Stay on this path for around 100 metres before reaching a T junction. Turn left, and then immediately fork right, heading slightly uphill. The path bends uphill to the right and you'll pop out back on the racecourse. Continue straight at the crossroads.

Racecourse to Finish

For the next kilometre, you'll be walking uphill as you head back to the car. While it does level out eventually, the first 300m is quite steep, but the terrain is dry and the path is wide which should help. At the next fork, ignore the dirt track to the right, instead sticking to the solid path you're on, heading into the trees.

This stretch can be quite muddy, but there are usually dry banks on either side to dodge the worst of it. At the crossroads, go straight ahead, taking a path that's at your 1 o'clock. Follow this path as it bends left and then right, before approaching a fork. At the fork, take the left branch, joining a relatively wide path. This path is good underfoot but popular with cyclists, so keep an eye out. After a little while, you'll see the white barriers of the racecourse directly ahead of you. Continue walking straight towards the barriers, before going straight over at two small consecutive crossroads. At this point you should see the grandstand slightly over to your left, and the car park where this walk began straight ahead. Follow the track towards the car park, heading downhill before retracing your initial steaps to return to the car.

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