

the county's favourite writer



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Country walk: Petworth Park



THIS is a reminder of what has to be one of the finest walks in England.

We are so lucky in this country to have many of the great houses and historic parks still in existence much as they were designed during and after Elizabeth I's reign.

In the case of Petworth Park this was designed later, by Capability Brown, in the 1750s and the 700 acres are nowadays open to the public.

This week's walk is just a sample of what is on offer there, and another reminder that this week sees the most exciting time of all when the herds of fallow deer are rutting.

There are car parks at both north and south ends and I chose the northern one off the A283 at SU966238 as it is more commodious.

A display board with map shows you all the paths winding throughout the park as shown on my map.

Last week I took my favourite route near the east wall, under the avenue of oaks, to the lower pond. Moorhens, mallard, and Canada geese keep the fish company.

Bream, carp, tench, rudd, roach and perch live there. Also, there are often small flocks of various finches and buntings around this pond.

In the past I have seen twites, but usually mixed linnets, redpolls, greenfinches, and yellow



hammers. The tawny autumn grassland reminds one of the Serengeti, especially with the herds of deer everywhere around.

On my visit there were several flowers still in bloom, notable thyme and autumn hawkbit, these often colonising some of the thousands of yellow hill ant castles.

There are tufts of hard and soft rush, which the bucks like to beat with their antlers.

I walked on south and climbed the hill between the two ponds to admire the huge sweet chestnut trees which are 250 years old.

This also gives the finest views over the whole park.

Over the hill lies the upper pond in front of the magnificent house, and the sweeping lawns which the artist Turner admired and painted.

This also holds water birds such as cormorants and great crested grebes at times. Circling this lake takes you back northwest close by the west wall, when you have yet another brilliant view to the plain below.

Thing is, there is never a dull moment on the five-mile (8km) stroll around this vast ecosystem and historic landscape.

All the other great houses of Sussex have splendid features but none can really compare with its time-warp which remains intact and perfectly unspoilt.