

# Rail to Trail – Guildford to Brookwood

This is a longer walk but highly rewarding with a beautiful range of nature along the way and some very rewarding views! Chalk grassland, ancient woodland, long shady paths, open meadows and heaths are all en route.

1. Leave Guildford station on platform one and turn right. Look for the underpass and go down the slope and look for the left-hand signs up to Riverside walk options. Go up the steps keep to the right-hand side and follow the path between the buildings diagonally in front of you. Go down the steps to the canal towpath. Turn right. Follow the towpath past the car park.
2. Turn right at the church and cross the road into The Mount, the hill opposite. Ascend this long hill, you'll find a few benches to rest upon. As the hill flattens out, you begin to walk (or stagger!) along a track way. There is a break in the hedgerow on the right and a gate onto The Mount, a large nature reserve. Enter the field at the Guildford Council sign and in the middle of your view is Guildford Cathedral with Woking's skyscrapers visible to your right-hand side. (On the bright day I visited, I could see the Wembley arch and The Shard in the distance). The chalk grassland in front of you is home to a large number of pyramidal orchids best seen in June or July. It is also known for its skylarks that nest on the ground here between April and August. Enjoy the view before turning left and angling across on the cut paths to the gate you can see in Henley Wood an ancient oak and ash woodland that stretches down the hill. Look for wildflowers, orchids, butterflies and birds. Enter the gate and pass through the woodland onto a grass track.
3. The track continues across old grassland, which is lined with old man's beard. Keep going along the track through more gates and enjoy the wild plants and the skylarks throughout the spring and summer. You will pass some pylons on your left. These are worth checking for peregrine falcons in the winter time as they may be resting anywhere on the higher parts. You will soon meet the A31 Hogsback Road.
4. Cross carefully here into the alleyway opposite. At the bottom turn right. At the first road junction, keep left and follow the road down the hill to the footbridge. Cross the A3 dual carriageway. At the bottom of the ramp, turn immediately right down some rather worn, broken steps to the field and cross on the path to the hedgerow opposite and exit. Cross over the lane into the field opposite and angle right. Follow this path through a few planted trees and keeping right, just before the fencing on the field reaches the corner, look for the path sign on your right and cross the wooden bridge here into the lane. Follow the bridleway signs. For a short distance, this feels extremely rural on the edge of the University campus. Stay on the bridle path. After the Veterinary School building, at the Give Way sign turn sharp left into the middle of the hedgerow.
5. This footpath can easily be missed. Where the path appears to divide turn left down the hill with the car park on your right. This can be muddy after rain. At the edge of the woodland turn right keeping to the left of the car park. On the left now is a stretch of young beech woodland. There are bat boxes on some of the trees here. Follow the path keeping to the left-hand side of the buildings and car parks. Continue on some way passing under the railway bridge on the same path. When you enter the green space, you will see a footpath gate on your right

6. Turn left following the path across the field with a line of trees on your left. Pass between the two benches. Now angle right passing a blue sign. On entering the woodland continue forward and you will see a path off to the left. Follow this and at the vehicle cross track turn right and follow this down to the road.
7. Turn right then soon turn left at the public footpath sign just before the bus stop. This path goes through lovely mixed woodland where woodpeckers, nuthatches and many common birds can be found. Soon you meet a path crossroads
8. Turn left keeping to the left of some garden fences. Cross the vehicle track and continue on the path. You'll pass a rusty gate and broken stiles. It can be muddy after rain. At one point, the path suddenly divides. The right-hand side goes up a steep bank, following a path parallel to the other one but along the edge of a field, giving you a different perspective. Soon you will find that the path reappears on the left and joins a farm track in the same direction. Continue on the track. You will soon see a footbridge appear on the left through the hedgerow.
9. Cross this bridge and turn right along another path. Continue keeping to the electric fence on your left until you come to a metal gate. Exit the gate and turn left along the roadway. There are often many jackdaws in these fields with the horses. Pass two houses on the left, and on the bend, turn right onto the public footpath. Stay on this main path following signs for the footpath wherever you see them. The path runs parallel to a main road. Just before meeting the road there is a largely dried out pond on the right-hand side with old platforms and boardwalks and some reedmace. This may be an interesting place to stop in spring and summer. After crossing a footbridge, turn immediately left and this will take you to the road.
10. Cross at the road crossing and follow the footpath sign on the other side. This will take you to Merrist Wood Agricultural College. Ring-necked parakeets are found in the woodland here. At the road turn sharp left into the college grounds. (Opposite here is Roker's, a possible place to stop for refreshments but known for inexpensive bird food supplies). Follow the road in towards the Reception and Advice Centre. Keep following the public footpath signs, found after the buildings on the path on the left-hand side of the road. You will soon cross another road and pass a sign called Find your Way. This footpath weaves its way through Merrist Wood College. If you keep your eyes open, you can see and follow the public footpath signs. You will pass the Animal Management Centre. The public are not normally permitted to enter this building, but you may see some interesting animals through the windows. After this, along the track, the public footpath goes off to the right-hand side again it is signposted. (This section of this walk is one of two walks around Worplesdon in the Blackwater Valley Nature Walks book). You'll reach a kiss gate and then cross a fallow field and reach a road.
11. Turn left and pass a bakery and coffee stall that may provide welcome refreshment. Continue to the roundabout but keeping left on the footpath. You will cross the tiny Stanford Brook and Fox Corner nature area, a pleasant place to wander. Continue on along the left-hand road and where it turns sharply left cross into Malthouse Lane and continue straight on. At Pirbright Common, the lane turns into a rough track. Follow the track. The woodland soon becomes mainly birch. The track becomes more deeply rutted with a parallel footpath to the left-hand side, but you will soon meet a junction where it divides.

12. Take the left-hand choice. You are now in the main part of Pirbright Common and to the left, if you have the energy to explore, you may well find, especially in spring and summer some of the rarer birds and insects to be found here. Dartford warblers and stonechats should be quite easily found, maybe tree pipits too. You might also find some digger wasps and sundew plants. Keep heading in the same general direction any houses will be in view over to your left-hand side. You will end up on a lane soon with houses both sides so join this keeping right. Follow this lane until it bends to the left and look to your right. You should soon see a gate and a bridleway continuing on roughly the same trajectory as the lane was. Take this and follow it through the common and when you reach the road cross to the other side. Anywhere here you could find grazing ponies.
13. Less than 1 mile to go! After crossing the road and entering the common, you will see a blue bridleway arrow on a post so follow this route. Enter the woodland join the raised path and cross two footbridges before exiting onto the open heath again. Continue on the same path, crossing another footbridge and soon you will reach the road.
14. Turn right. At the very end of the lane enter the gate to Brookwood Cemetery and turn right. Take the next turning on the left. Follow this road to the double gates at the end in front of you. (Dogs are not allowed in this part of the cemetery). This is the Zoroastrian cemetery (Zoroastrianism is an Iranian religion, one of the world's oldest organized faiths). Turn right, along on the lane. Follow this with the main American and British war cemeteries to the right and continue until you reach the entrance to Brookwood station. This will be on your left, take care not to miss it. You should be able to open the gate, if not press the buzzer and ask the operator to release the lock. If you have a long wait for your train there is a small bakery and café on the road just outside the station.